

# *SARASWATI'S PEARLS*



*Dialogues on the Yoga of Sound*

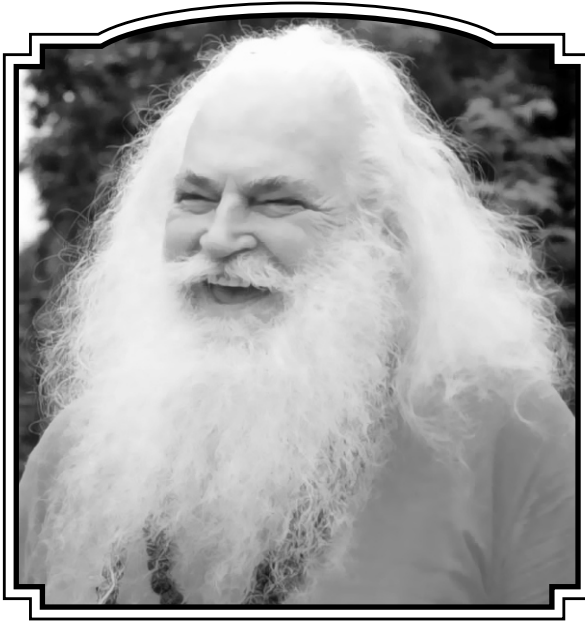
*By*

**Yogacharya Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani**

*and*

**Yogacharini Dr. Sangeeta Laura Biagi**

Dedicated  
to  
The Greatest Guru in Our Universe



The Lion of Puducherry  
Yogamaharishi  
Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj  
(24.07.1907 - 29.12.1993)

Who protected the Purity of Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga  
with his Mighty Roar of Truth

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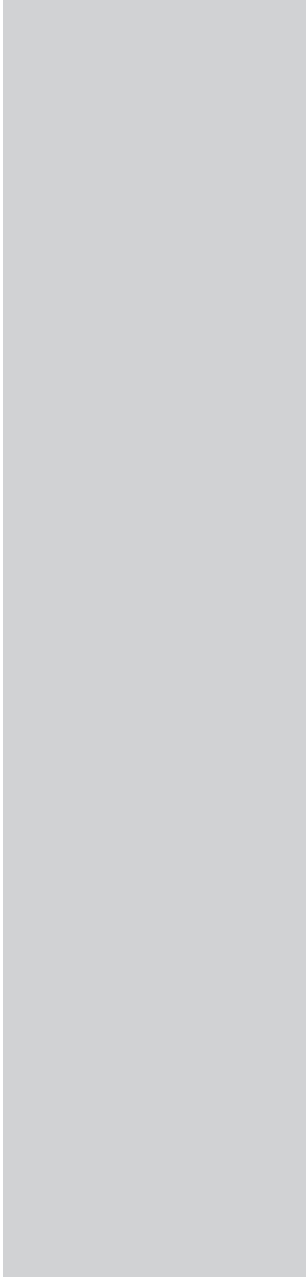
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**Saraswati's Pearls:  
Dialogues on the  
Yoga of Sound**

*Yogacharya*

*Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani*

*and*

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## Saraswati's Smile

This small book has proven itself “a pearl of great price”. Smooth, beautiful, compact and of intrinsic value, it is worthy of being used as a *mala* (rosary) of Wisdom which a *sadhak* may utilize to navigate the tsunamis of *samskaric* experience. To the point, concise, direct and pithy, the book is worthy of being called a “*sutra*”, a thread upon which nuggets of insights may be strung. Exploring the spiritual essence of *nada* (sound) Dr. Ananda and Dr. Sangeeta have showered upon the reader the fruits of their respective *dharana* on the essence of music. Filled with invaluable information about illustrious personages who by their lives have illuminated the path of those who walk behind them, the book elevates the spirit and acts as proof that the Higher Life can be, must be reached! I am certain this small offering has made the Goddess of Music, Saraswati smile, and with that smile, she infuses us with the courage to “seek and stop until we find,” that great cosmic “Soundless Sound”!

Puduvai Kalaimamani,  
Yogamani, Yogacharini  
*Smt. Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani*  
Ashram Acharya and Director,  
ICYER at Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, India.

# Music is life and All life is music!

If life is the non-stop interaction between the internal and external environment of every *jiva*, then music is indeed life itself. Every breath we take resonates with the *ajapa japa (hamsa sohum)* and every biological rhythm of our body, mind and emotions is but a manifestation of the interconnections, we as the microcosm share with the universal, cosmic macrocosm.

According to classical Indian thought, the entire manifest universe (*prakriti*) arises from *nada* or divine vibration. This condenses into a point of focus, the *bindu* and through the aperture of this ‘point of concentrated focus’ the manifestation of the universal play, the *kala* occurs. Of course, all of this is only for our experience and liberation as explained by *Maharishi Patañjali (bhogapavargartham drishyam - Yoga Darshan 2:18)*.

For me personally the state of being induced by music is indeed a state of *dhyana*, even a state of *yoga* and my soul resonates strongly with the statement, “music is external meditation and meditation is internal music”. Through music we can lose ourselves, lose all the *anatmasu* (identities of the non-self) thus



truly finding our Self (*atma khyati*). This for me is a method of *atma jnana* that dispels the blinding ignorance of *avidya*, the root of all *klesha* and *karma*.

This book is the result of great love, devotion and unstinting effort by my dearest Sangeeta. She is indeed the mother of this creation and by virtue of her great labor of love has begotten this literary offspring of ours. It was entirely her idea and the bidirectional flow of musical and *yogic* concepts over the past few years has indeed given me so much.

My sincere prayer is that all readers of this book also receive what I have received from the Divine in terms of inner luminescence and self realization through these heart-to-heart, intellect stimulating discussions.

*Yogacharya Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani*

Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, India

September 2013

## A dream come true

Many are the blessings that I count every day. One of them is the gift of music, the wonderful science and art that has uplifted so many across time and cultures, and for which I have had profound interest since an early age. The other is the gift of *yoga*. To be a student in the *paramparai* of Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri is, indeed, a blessing. Swamiji encouraged his students to learn the classical arts of Southern India, Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam, as a *yogic sadhana*, practice in the search for Truth. “Yoga is a way of life” is one of his statements. If we understand music as a form and a result of *yoga* we can also say that “music is a way of life” and that one can, moment-by-moment, construct a wonderful composition of actions, thoughts and deeds. When I met Dr. Ananda in the fall of 2009, it was clear that I had finally “come home.” Dr. Ananda is a very accomplished *Carnatic* vocalist and *mridungam* player, a composer, a *Bharatanatyam* dancer and choreographer, and a *yogi*. He embodies Swamiji’s teachings: *yoga*, music and dance are, for him, a way of life. During the time I lived and studied at Ananda Ashram I had the opportunity to see and hear Dr. Ananda play music, teach dance and also teach and practice *hatha yoga* and the *Tantric* sciences of *Yantra* and *Laya Yoga*.

As a singer and a musician myself, I became more and more enamored with Carnatic music and had the opportunity to study this magnificent art form.

The connections between *yoga* and Carnatic music practices started to surface on their own till one night, while still in the Ashram, a dream visited my sleep:

*... I am in a library with high bookshelves filled with old manuscripts. I am looking for something. I turn my head and see Dr. Ananda sitting on the floor of one of the library's rooms, quiet and waiting for my question. I ask him to reveal some of his insights into the sublime world of Carnatic music and how this art is, in itself, a form of yoga sadhana. He encourages me to pick up the book that we have written and to look at the answers in it. All of a sudden I remember and walk towards one of the shelves where I pick up a golden yellow hard cover book with the image of the Goddess Saraswati on its front page. The joy of holding it in my hands wakes me up to yet another reality.*

The following morning I text-messaged Dr. Ananda to share this dream with him. His prompt reply was: “Ok, let’s do it.

The book is already existing in another reality so let's bring it down to this one and share it with others.” For the next few months, every other Thursday night, Dr. Ananda and I met in Swamiji's *kutir* at Ananda Ashram. Each time, I came with one question and then many more unfolded out of our conversations. I was so filled with joy at the possibility to sit “at the feet of the master” to ask him questions about *yoga* and music, the two great loves of my life.

These articles are the edited transcription of our dialogues. The title, *Saraswati's Pearls* came later, one evening in which I was contemplating the concept of the *yoga sutra* as a series of aphorisms set together as pearls on a string. The image of the pearls resonated with the Goddess' pearl necklace: each dialogue can be appreciated like a pearl, perfect and yet imperfect, whole in itself and yet connected to the others, containing some of the infinite *sattvik* wisdom of the great Goddess *Saraswati*. It is a joy, an honor and a humbling privilege to share their shimmering light.

*Yogacharini Sangeeta Laura Biagi, Ph.D.*

Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry

March 2013

## Note to the Reader

**Y**ogacharya Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani is the son and the successor of Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj who, in the text, is mostly addressed as “Swamiji.” He is also the son and successor of Pudukai Kalaimamani, Pudukai Shakti, Yogamani Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani who, in the text, is mostly addressed as “Ammaji.”

Their *Gurukulam* (home of the *guru*) at Ananda Ashram – ICYER is located in Chinnamudaliarchavady on the coast of the Bay of Bengal in Tamil Nadu. In the text, it is generally referred to as “Ananda Ashram.”

The City Centre of ICYER is called Yoganjali Natyalayam and it was established by Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri in 1993. The flourishing Centre of Classical Rishiculture Yoga, Bharatanatyam and Carnatic Vocal Music with currently more than 400 actively enrolled students and more than 15,000 alumni is located in central Pondicherry, behind the New Bus Stand and next to the Iyyanar Temple. It caters to the needs of the local populace with Yoga Education and Yoga Therapy programs as well as providing special individual and personally-tailored lessons for passing tourists and those

visiting Pondicherry on a short term basis. In the text, it is generally referred to as “Yoganjali Natyalayam” and with the abbreviation of “Yognat.”

The *samadhi* of Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri, is located at Sri Kambaliswamy Madam, an ancient Hindu holy site which is the spiritual base of the ICYER and its work. *Pujas* and other cultural and religious festivals are held here. In the text, it is generally referred to as “The Madam.”

I

**Nada Yoga:  
Healing Sounds**

# Nada Yoga: Healing Sounds

*Sangeeta* = Swamiji used to say that “Yoga is a Way of Life.” Life is sound, so can we say that yoga is sound?

*Ananda* = Yoga is indeed life, and life is nothing but eternal vibration. This vibration is then expressed in the Universe as sound. Indian culture is based on the ideal of sublimation and evolution from gross to subtle and beyond. Hence, forms of chanting that enable our evolution through layers of existence, have always been an important aspect of spiritual life in India. Chanting *mantras*, performing *japa*, singing *bhajans* and the use of *nada pranayamas* such as the *bhramari* and the *pranava* are important parts of the *yogic* life.

*S* = What is nada yoga?

*A* = Nada yoga may be defined as the theoretical and analytical understanding of the universal vibrational primordial sound, coupled with a dedicated practice of vibrational sounds at different levels of being for the purpose of attaining universal oneness. This includes in its purview numerous concepts, tools and techniques of *samkhya*, *yoga* and *tantra*. *Samkhya*-based concepts of creation as well as *tantra*-based concepts of *nadis*, *bindus*, *chakras* and *bija mantras* are important components of *nada yoga*.



S = In many ancient traditions around the world we find that the manifest reality is created by breath and sound. For example in the Christian tradition we find in the Ancient Testament the creation of the world through "The Verb." Is this also present in yoga philosophy of manifestation and life?

A = In the divine play (*leela*) of creation, there first exists the primordial sound (*nada*). This is the cosmic vibration that may be understood as the *pranava shabda*. Then there occurs a point, a *bindu* from which *kala*, the play of *maya*, starts to occur with all creatures playing roles to the best of their ability.

When we want to understand this process we contemplate different objects ranging from the gross to the subtle. The subtle objects of contemplation (*sukshma vishayatvam*) extend all the way up to the unmanifest form, the *alinga*. *Linga* means "a mark." It refers to that final manifest symbol that exists before we transcend the manifest Universe and enter unmanifest existence. *Linga* is the link between these two, the manifest and the unmanifest, a bridge between two worlds. It is a point on which we can stand, a point of reference. When the devotee looks at the *Shiva lingam* in places of worship the *lingam* appears to be a long pole-like structure. But if one contemplates a *lingam* looking from above, the *lingam* appears as a point, the point from which everything originates. Contemplation on this *alinga*, literally, the place beyond the *linga*, produces a state of higher freedom, a state where bondage no longer exists.

All ancient cultures have tried to understand this freedom, this place where man can finally be “One” with the cosmos.

Maharishi Patañjali<sup>1</sup> says *tasya vachakah pranava* – the vibrational sound of the Divine is the *pranava* (Yoga Darshan – I:27). The *pranava* consists of the three sacred sounds (*nada*) that may be expressed as:

- The *akara nada* – the AAA sound representing creation;
- The *ukara nada* – the OOO/UUU sound representing sustenance;
- The *makara nada* – the MMM sound representing dissolution.

<sup>1</sup> Maharishi Patañjali is one of the foremost of Indian sages whose life is interspersed with legendary stories of great mastery. He is the codifier of the *Yoga Darshan*, the *yogic* perspective of living as manifest in his *Yoga Sutra*, a series of aphorisms on *yoga* that give us the teachings of *ashtanga* and *kriya yoga* as a means to achieve *kaivalya*. He, like many seers of India, seemed to have lived for centuries and is believed to have lived more than 2500 years ago.

The potent combination of these three sounds results in the production of the ultimate sacred sound of *aum* (*pranava* or *omkara nada*). There is no *mantra* higher than the *pranava* and there is no healing tool higher than the divine power of the Universe! Maharishi Patañjali further states that the *pranava japa* (repeated utterance of the sound with deep feeling for

the meaning – *Yoga Darshan* –I:28) can eradicate all the obstacles in the *yogic* path towards attaining the realized oneness with the Divine (*Yoga Darshan* – I:29).

The *pranava* is the key to unlocking the hidden Divinity lying dormant within each and every one of us.

*S = Sound is both a manifestation of creation and a way to contemplate its origins. What is the relationship between the vibratory content of sound and its form?*

A = An interesting concept of *nada yoga* is that everything is vibration, and that this vibration is perceived by us as sound. The moment we are able to understand that sound comes out of that vibration, we are able to invoke it. For example the seed sound of *muladhara chakra*, its *bija* [seed sound], is *lang*. This is the closest human sound of that vibration. Of course the essential vibrations of the *chakras* are so high that they are way beyond human hearing. What we are making with our vocal apparatus is the closest human attempt. When I make this sound, I am channeling my mind and the sound becomes a *man-tra*, i.e. a tool of the mind – because I want to invoke that sound. Yet, the *bija* sound is not a label that I can place on the *chakra*. We are only trying to translate supersonic vibrations into human sounds. What is important is to understand that there are different layers and levels in the use of sounds, in the use of *mantra* and in the use of *nada yoga* techniques.

---

S = What are these levels?

A = The first layer is where we write a sound out. We write the *bija* for *muladhara chakra* as “*lang*,” for example. The second level is where we chant the sound, making it audible. The third level is where, without producing it externally, we make the sound internally, in the mind. When we are able to go from the written to the spoken and above, we are able to channel the energy of the mind. The mind is a great fuel that is able to push us through the vibration. This is where the *mantra* becomes *manasika* and it gains the maximum power. The mind is the most powerful tool we have. It is very essential that the mind remains focused when we do these practices. If I chant the *mantra* while focusing on something completely different, the power of the chant won’t be activated.

This is, in part, what is happening in our Indian temples where the *pandits*, our temple priests, are performing the rites but more often than not their minds are focused on something other than the deity they are worshipping. The *mantra* is being spoken, the Sanskrit and the tune are correct, but the power of the *mantra* is not there.

Many people forget the power of the mind. Be aware. One of the most important aspects of *nada* is not only making the sound but also where you are focusing the sound. As an example: the sunlight is everywhere but when you take a lens

and focus it, it becomes a beam and its effect is much more powerful. Similarly, sound is all around us: *mantras* are its lenses.

S = *The idea that the inner sounds are more important than the uttered sounds, is coming back over and over. But why? Why are inner sounds more important? Do we mean by that, that they are subtler and therefore closer in frequency to the divine vibrations? And if so, are we all aiming at deep silence? Are all the sounds we hear only the gross manifestation of the One? And is the One silent? Meaning that in it all movement ceases? And therefore, being vibrations a result of movement, sound also ceases to sound?*

A = Louder are the vibrations that are external. Inner vibrations are subtler and more silent while the most inner and deeper ones are the most silent, until they are as subtle as the manifest Universe (*prakriti*). The inner-most vibrations are those of pure silence, the causal silence, that is beyond the Universe itself (*purusha*). Lord Shiva, the *guru* of all *gurus* as Sri Dakshinamurti<sup>2</sup> teaches in silence for that is the highest form of teaching where wisdom flows seamlessly from the mind of the *guru* to the mind of the *sisya* [disciple].

<sup>2</sup> Sri Dakshinamurti is regarded to be a *guru avatara*, the incarnation as a *guru* or spiritual master, of Lord Shiva (see Tejomayananda, 1993:50).

He is the blissful youthful teacher who sits facing the southern direction and teaches in silence to his four aged disciples gesturing consciousness with the *chin mudra*.

*S = Could you say that when we take up the study of sound and music in a yogic way, we also take a step to regain our state of health?*

*A = Yoga is fast becoming the “IN” thing all over the world but in our haste to regain health and well being though the various techniques of yoga chikitsa we must not forget that Yoga is all about “life” and is not merely a set of techniques to be applied blindly. We must take into consideration all the following aspects that are part of an integrated approach to the problem. These include a healthy and life nourishing diet, a healthy and natural environment, a wholistic lifestyle, adequate bodywork through asanas, mudras and kriyas, invigorating breath work through the use of pranayama and the production of a healthy thought process through the higher practices of jnana, nada and raja yoga.*

When such an approach is used, yoga can for sure help regain the ease we had lost earlier through dis-ease (as implied by Maharishi Patañjali’s *sthira sukham asanam - Yoga Darshan II: 46*). It can also enable us to attain a dynamic state of mental equanimity (*samatvam yoga uchyate - Bhagavad Gita II: 48*) where the opposites cease to affect us any more (*tato dhwandwa anabhigatha - Yoga Darshan II: 48*). This enables us to move from a state of illness and disease to one of health and well-being that ultimately allows us to move from a lower animal

nature to a higher human nature and finally reach the highest Divine Nature that is our birthright.

*S = What is the relationship between sonic vibrations and health according to yoga?*

*A = Everything in life is vibration. Health is the state of perfect oneness with the cosmic vibration. Illness is the result of dichotomy. When we are able to re-tune ourselves to the natural, universal vibrations, health occurs. We can think of health as a certain 'state' of cosmic vibration. When we are 'in tune' with that, and we are vibrating with it, we are truly happy and healthy. Every cell in our body vibrates in unison with that divine vibration, and in that state, it is producing cosmic music, even if we cannot hear it. The music is always there but then we are not always attuned to it. When all our cells are vibrating as they should, producing the note that they should, we have a grand-symphony orchestra. Sometimes the cells go off tune and disharmony occurs. So all the *nada yoga* techniques are really aimed at enabling us to retune ourselves so that we can get back again into that balanced vibration. That is health.*

For example, all the techniques that involve the *ha-kara*, creating strong emissions of the "ha" sound from the area of the solar plexus, we are using the sound of that center, the solar center. This sound is working on the "sun center," activating and creating the message "I want the vibrational

health of this center to be good.” Generally the sound is produced when we breathe out. When we do *jathis* and shake up the body and then “woosh out” the breath, we throw out through sound. This is also a form of *nada* because we are communicating the desire to let go of our physical, emotional and mental garbage.

We should develop a sense of freedom. This freedom is all about choice. We have to choose freedom and once we have the freedom we can make choice. With freedom comes responsibility. Most people think that freedom is the absence of responsibility. On the other hand, the biggest freedom comes with the biggest responsibilities, because then you know that whatever you do, whatever you say and whatever you think has *karma*. So then, you are careful about what you say, do and think.

When we use the sound of *aaa*, we use the lower part of the lungs, with *uuu* the middle part and with *mmm* the upper part. Moreover, with each, we use the lower part of the body, the middle part of the body and the upper part of the body and, at another level, the various aspects of our existence, the gross (*stuhla*), the subtle (*sukshma*), and the causal (*karana*) are also stimulated.

*S = What are some of the important techniques that the vibration of sound uses to produce healing effects?*



A = *Jathis* involving the *hakara*, the *mukha bhastrika*, the *malla kriya* with the *hakara*, *bhujangini mudra*, and the *nada pranayamas* such as the *bhramari* and the *pranava* are some of these techniques.<sup>3</sup> In the *bhramari pranayama* the nasal sound like a bee is used. There are the sounds of the male and the female bees. With the *bhramari pranayama* we use the *shanmukhi mudra*, also called the *yoni mudra*. With this *mudra* we are trying to close all the openings of the head and face. What we are doing is utilizing the thumbs to close the auditory canals. Then, the index and middle fingers are lightly placed over the closed eyes to gently block the light. The ring fingers are placed on the nostrils, just to feel the sound vibrations at this level. The fingers are not used to block or close but rather to feel: the hearing, the sight, the smell and finally the speech by placing the little fingers on the lips. The five senses are therefore placed under control and awareness. This is an excellent example of a *pratyahara mudra*.

If we also sit in an *asana* such as *padma asana* or *vajra asana*, then we also bring under our awareness the *karmendriya*, the action senses: the feet (locomotion), the hands (dexterity), the organs of excretion (excretion), reproduction and speech (communication).

<sup>3</sup> A detailed list of these practices can be found in Dr. Ananda's article, "*Nada Yoga Techniques for Prevention and Management of Breathing Disorders*," reproduced in the Appendix I.

Multiple limbs of *yoga* are stimulated at the same time: *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*. In *bhramari pranayama*

for example the relationship of the inhale and the exhale can be either 1:2 or 1:3, where we breathe in for a count of 6 and then breathe out for a count of twelve or eighteen.

*S = Could you expand a bit more on the benefits of pranava pranayama?*

*A= In the pranava pranayama, the humming sounds of the pranava “a-u-m” are used. Humming has been recently shown to improve nasal ventilation and also stabilise the cardiovascular rhythms. This new light on humming and nasal ventilation can explain the scientific basis by which these pranayamas prevent as well as help in the management of sinusitis. This is another reason why practices like the surya namaskar should always be done with the chanting of the surya mantras and another reason why the chanting of mantras and scriptures should be encouraged in yoga therapy and training. We will also discuss some of these studies later.*

*S = All these nada practices involve an elongated out breath. Yet, people today are mostly shallow breathers and will resist such lengths of exhalation...*

*A = Yes. Most of the students will, but the moment you use these nada techniques, people can breathe out for a much longer time than they expected.*

*S = Why is it necessary to breathe out for long counts?*

A = Whenever you breathe in, your heart rate tends to go faster. Whenever you breathe out your heart rate goes slower. This is known as *sinus arrhythmia* in medical physiology. When you are breathing out longer, you are lowering the rate of your heartbeat. There is a theory that when we breathe in, the sympathetic nervous system is activated and when we breathe out, the parasympathetic nervous system is more active and the sympathetic effects are diminished. When people are under stress or tension, they tend to breathe in more often. Also when you breathe in and out, there are pressure changes inside your chest. When we breathe in the chest cavity expands and the inner pressure is lower. The blood from the abdominal area is pulled up because of the decrease in the pressure. Therefore more blood is rushing to the chest. Because more blood is coming, the sympathetic nervous system is alerting the heart to pump it faster than usual. Whereas when we breathe out, there is more pressure in the thoracic cavity and the blood is pushed out with a relative decrease in heart rate. In other words, when we prolong the out breath, we calm ourselves.

The other thing is that the heart exists constantly in polarity. The active systole (*spanda*) is where the heart is contracting and sending blood to the whole body. The only thing which it does not do is to supply itself with blood. In the active phase, the heart is not nourished. When the heart goes into diastole (*nishpanda*), a relaxation, it does supply and nourish itself.

When the heart beats faster and faster, the time for diastole becomes less. The faster your heart goes, the less it supplies itself. The slower the heart beats, the more it is nourished. It makes sense to have a slower, stronger and healthier heart.

*S = Many people nowadays are having blocks and other issues in their coronary arteries and other blood vessels. In your experience, by doing these practices, can we change those disease patterns?*

*A = This makes me think of a patient who first came to me about nine years ago. He used to drink and smoke a lot. When he came to me, his heart vessels were almost completely blocked. He was a businessman and did not, in his perception, have time to practice. So we worked on a few small things. I asked him which Hindu God he preferred, and he told me Lord Shiva. So I told him to sit everyday and chant the *mantra* “*Om Nama Shivaya*” together with the practice of *pranava pranayama*, *chandra nadi pranayama* and some basic *jathis* and relaxation. After three years, he came back. He had gone to the cardiologist in Chennai and did all the scans for a check up. They found that all the blocks were still there, but the arteries had branched out and created collaterals around his heart, which was now getting all the blood it needed. We asked him what he had been doing and he said that daily in the morning and at night, he did 108 *Om Namah Shivaya* chanting.*

What happened is that to emit the sound of the *mantra*, his in breath was definitely shorter than his out breath, creating a ratio of at least 1:2 if not more. Therefore, his heart rate lowered, facilitating a larger supply for the heart to nourish itself while also stimulating the creation of the collaterals.

The *mantra* can be a prayer or whatever is important for the person, as long as it is a higher natured utterance.

*S = Can you share some studies on this topic?*

A = Recent studies have shown that chanting creates sound vibrations that encourage air to move back and forth between the sinus membranes and nasal passages. This air movement helps open the tiny ducts, or *ostia*, that connect the nose to the sinuses, allowing the sinuses to drain properly. This can help prevent infections from settling down in the sinuses and create a healthy environment therein. All the sinuses are effectively ventilated by humming and this is an important benefit as previous research has shown that poor sinus ventilation increases the risk for sinusitis. When the sinuses are well ventilated, infections have no chance of settling down at all.

A study done by Jon Lundberg and Eddie Weitzberg of the Karolinska Institute in Sweden has shown that daily humming or “*Om*” chanting may actually prevent infections from taking hold. They found that humming increased nitric oxide levels

fifteen fold, compared to quiet exhalations without sound. The exhalations of people with healthy sinuses tend to have high nitric oxide levels, indicating that more air is able to flow between the sinuses and the nose.

Tapas Pramanik and colleagues in the Department of Physiology, Nepal Medical College, Kathmandu, studied immediate effects of five minutes of *bhramari pranayama* performed with a 1:3 ratio. They reported decreases in heart rate and blood pressure with a feeling of calmness and well-being. They concluded that *bhramari pranayama* balanced the autonomic nervous system through enhanced parasympathetic nervous system activity in their study group of fifty medical students and professionals.<sup>4</sup>

It is also interesting to note that François B. Vialatte and colleagues at the RIKEN Brain Science Institute, Laboratory for Advanced Brain Signal Processing, Japan, have in 2009 reported paroxysmal gamma waves on EEG recordings taken during the performance of *bhramari pranayama*. The authors postulated that *bhramari* could be also treated as a technique of *mantra* meditation due to its repetitive humming nature and because it produces a sense of mind refreshment and blissfulness. The generation of controlled high-frequency gamma waves as

<sup>4</sup> Pramanik T., Pudasaini B., Prajapati R. "Immediate Effect of Slow Pace Breathing Exercise *Bhramari Pranayama* on Blood Pressure and Heart Rate." *Nepal Med Coll J* 2010; 12:154- 57.

evidenced by this study may indicate enhanced parasympathetic activity.<sup>5</sup>

In one of the pioneering studies, Luciano Bernardi and colleagues from the University of Pavia, Italy, reported the effect of prayer and *yoga mantras* on autonomic cardiovascular rhythms in 2001.<sup>6</sup> They recorded breathing rates in twenty-three adults during normal talking, recitation of the *Ave Maria* prayer, *yoga mantras* and controlled breathing. Breathing was more regular when the *Ave Maria* was repeated fifty times in Latin and when the *mantra* 'om-mani-padme-om' was chanted. Both prayer and *mantra* caused striking, powerful and synchronous increases in existing cardiovascular rhythms when recited six times a minute. This recitation slowed respiration and enhanced heart rate variability and baroreflex sensitivity. The study, published in the *British Medical Journal*, concluded

<sup>5</sup> François B. Vialatte, Hovagim Bakardjian, Rajkishore Prasad, and Andrzej Cichocki. "EEG Paroxysmal Gamma Waves During *Bhramari Pranayama*: A *Yoga* Breathing Technique". *Consciousness and Cognition* 2009; 18: 977-88.

<sup>6</sup> Luciano Bernardi. "Effect of rosary prayer and *yoga* mantras on autonomic cardiovascular rhythms: comparative study." *British Medical Journal*, 2001; 323:1446 (<http://www.bmj.com/content/323/7327/1446.full>).

that incantations are so beneficial that they could be "viewed as a health practice as well as a religious practice." Professor Bernardi says that *mantras* may have evolved as a device to improve concentration and induce calm. Similarly, the rosary may have partly evolved because it instilled a feeling of well-being and increased responsiveness to the

spiritual message, while enhancing the immune system.

My colleagues and I at ACYTER, JIPMER,<sup>7</sup> have recently reported beneficial effects of *pranava pranayama* done both from a sitting as well as lying down position in patients of hypertension.<sup>8,9</sup> In both studies we found significant fall in blood pressure and heart rate following performance of *pranava*. We attributed these cardiovascular changes to a mild Valsalva-like effect of decreased pre-load to the heart as well as normalization of autonomic cardiovascular rhythms by the prolonged, audible chanting. We also suggested that an increased vagal modulation and/or decreased sympathetic activity and improved baroreflex sensitivity along with an augmentation of endogenous nitric oxide production produced these beneficial effects. All of this implies better autonomic regulation of the heart in our subjects with a resultant integrated relaxation response, clinically valuable in patients of hypertension and other stress disorders.

<sup>7</sup> The Advanced Centre for Yoga Therapy, Education and Research (ACYTER), a collaborative venture between JIPMER, Puducherry and Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga (MDNIY), New Delhi (An autonomous organization under Dept. of AYUSH, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, New Delhi) was established by a MOU between JIPMER and MDNIY on 7th June 2008

<sup>8</sup> Bhavanani, Ananda Balayogi, Zeena S., and Madanmohan. "Immediate Cardiovascular Effects of *Pranava* Relaxation in Patients of Hypertension and Diabetes." *Biomedical Human Kinetics* 2012; 4: 66 - 69.

<sup>9</sup> Bhavanani, Ananda Balayogi, Zeena S, Madanmohan, and Basavaraddi IV. "Immediate Cardiovascular Effects of *Pranava* Pranayama in Hypertensive Patients." *Indian J Physiol Pharmacol* 2012; 56: 273-78.



S = In the paper by Luciano Bernardi et al, the authors write: "We believe that the rosary may have partly evolved because it synchronized with the inherent cardiovascular (Mayer) rhythms, and thus gave a feeling of wellbeing, and perhaps an increased responsiveness to the religious message. This could also apply to the relationship between mantra chanting and pranayama techniques. Before the modern day's system of counting the ratios of the breaths, wasn't pranayama a result of the ritual chanting of mantra?"

A = In the traditional orthodox culture of Hinduism (rather *sanathana dharma*), the *sandhya vandanam* was an important part of the daily life. This involved a specialized form of solar prayer done at *sandhya*, the meeting points of the day such as the sunrise, noon and sunset. The *Gayathri mantra* is the mainstay of this ritual, which is an opportunity to reconnect with one's universality through a ritualistic type of *pranayama*. To regulate the time of the in-drawing, retention and expulsion of air, the *Gayathri mantra* was recited with certain additions, thus raising the total number of syllables to sixty. Keeping one second per one syllable, the period of retention would end up at one minute, and so also the periods of in-drawing and expulsion.

Of course, the use of the *panchakshara* (five syllables of *na-ma-shi-va-ya*), *shadakshara* (six syllables of *sa-ra-va-na-bha-*

va), *saptakshara* (seven syllables of *sri-ra-ma-ja-ya-ra-ma*) and *ashtakshara* (eight syllables *om-na-mo-na-ra-ya-na-ya*) was common in those religiously inclined. The single *akshara* of the *pranava OM* was also used and the *ajapa gayatri* (*hamsa-sohum*) was also applicable in some cases. I have personally found the use of various rhythmic formulae to be useful from my percussion training (*mridungam*) and some examples include the *ta-ka-di-mi* (four counts), *ta-ki-ta* (three counts), *ta-ka-ta-ki-ta* (five counts), *ta-ki-ta-ta-ka-di-mi* (seven counts), *ta-ka-di-mi-ta-ka-ta-ki-ta* (nine counts). These are known as the five gaits of Indian music, the *pancha nadai* or *pancha gathi*.

*S = Dr. Bernardi's study also points to the fact that the repetition of holy formulas, mantra or any form of prayer, can be a health related practice as well as a religious practice. Perhaps the fact that so many people today – even the younger population – die of heart failure can be related to the fact that less and less people utter these types of sound?*

A = Young people today are too caught up in the external, material world to be aware or even bothered about the inner, spiritual one. Disease is essentially a state of *dwaitam*, a disassociation from the healthy state of universal oneness, *adwaitam*. When one doesn't even bother to utter the name of the Divine, then how can one expect the Divine to bless us? We only reap the result of the seeds that we have sown. If we

sow negativity, we will an only reap negativity. On the other hand, if we sow positivity, we may reap positivity. This is not only the Newtonian law of physics but is also the Universal Law, the *dharma rai*. When we open up to the Universe, when we call out to our universal mother, we will be blessed for sure. It doesn't actually matter whether we are calling Rama, Krishna, Allah, Buddha or Jesus. All we need to do is call out.

We only seem to remember the Divine in times of suffering and by that time, it may be too late to matter anymore. Hence, it is vital that one opens up to the nature of the sounds that one emits on a regular basis. This is part of the process of conscious evolution, working towards an integrated state of being, where our "mind-word-action" complex functions in a healthy, harmonious manner.

*S = Can these practices be also used as a preventive measure in children?*

A = Yes, surely. .... An early start will pay rich dividends of health, happiness and harmony for the individual, family and society.

*S = What has been your experience in teaching nada yoga to children at Yoganjali Natyalayam?*

A = They really enjoy it! It is one of the best ways to get them interested in the classes and hooked onto *yoga* for life. *Yoga* has a lot to offer children in terms of their health as well as complete well being as it is preventive, therapeutic and rehabilitative. When we want to teach the children *yoga*, it is important to understand their needs and use methods to create an interest in them. They must feel that *yoga* is fun and this may be attained through the use of *nada yoga* techniques.

At Yoganjali Natyalayam, we use a lot of *yoga* games and play to generate and sustain interest and this usually includes a healthy dose of simple animal poses with animal movements and animal sounds. *Asanas* such as *simha asana* with the *simha nada*, *gardhaba kriya* with the *nada*, *ushtra asana*, *shashaha asana*, *mayura asana*, *kokila asana* and *bhujanga asana* or *bhujangini mudra* are used very frequently. *Kukkriya pranayama* (dog panting breath) is an all time favorite with them and it tones their abdominal organs at the same time.

We use the *mukha bhastrika* and *nasarga mukha bhastrika* to activate the solar plexus, thus strengthening the diaphragm and producing strength, vitality and endurance. The *hakara kriya* and *malla kriya* is also one of the “bread and butter” practices of our classes. This use of breath power with the body can bring about revolutionary effects on the performance of the child and improve their state of mind, emotions and all round health. Concentration, memory and attention span are

all improved thus leading to improved academic performance in slow learners.

The *pranava pranayama* is used as it helps calm down hyperactive children and so does the *bhramari pranayama* that fulfills their desire to make noise while bringing about a serene calm. We use the *brahma mudra* often as a stress reliever and they enjoy its “play” value too. All the *mudras* used in *vibhaga* and *pranava pranayamas* such as *chin*, *chinmaya*, *adhi* and *brahma mudras* help them understand how body affects mind in a somato-psychic manner. It is of course vital that we emphasize the correlation between breath and movement in the different practices as this help them occupy their mind in the present as well as balance their emotional and mental instabilities. I have found that all of this helps produce serenity in the kids and this is very useful in children suffering from ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) as well as mental retardation and other mental disabilities.

We try to imbibe in them, a healthy sense of prayer and the classes start and end with such group chants that give them emotional and mental strength. It is always wonderful to come into the class and hear three hundred kids chanting the *Sri Kambaliswamy Stuthi* together!

We must never also forget that the antenatal period of the mother is an important contributor to the future health of the child. We must strive to bring the young ‘mothers-to-be’ into the *yoga* fold as a healthy baby is spawned from a healthy

mother. Lord Krishna tells us in the *Bhagavad Gita* that he will ensure that *yogis* are produced from the wombs of their *yogi*-mothers. This is another reason why young girls must be stimulated to take up a practice of *yoga*, as it may help to prevent many genetic and congenital disorders in their offspring, as well as help them have a safe delivery. The *nada yoga* techniques such as *pranava*, *bhramari* and *mantra* chanting would be excellent for such expectant mothers. This was understood in ancient India, and all mothers were given opportunities to listen to healing and growth enhancing chants during pregnancy.

**II**

**Origin of the  
Chant**

## Origin of the Chant

S= *I once asked you where in the body you feel singing to originate. You answered: "in the manipura chakra," the solar plexus area. How so?*

A= First of all we have to understand the concept of the five bodies, the *pancha kosha*: the physical and anatomical sheath, a level of existence in which we are just the body (*annamayakosha*); the physiological level of existence, on which our body can function (*pranamayakosha*); the level of existence in which there is a mind, a certain level of awareness and basic consciousness (*manomayakosha*); a level in which there is an intellectual understanding,

a discerning ability to know "right and wrong" (*vijnanamayakosha*); and a

final level in which we can experience the bliss of Universal existence (*anandamayakosha*). These five "sheaths" have to be held together, balanced and harmonized. This already requires energy. We, as individual entities in the Universe, as monads, are like a small piece of a large mirror. All the pieces reflect light, yet each has its own entity. Each drop of water is part of the rainbow yet each one has its own rainbow within it.

Our connection as an individual to the Universe requires a specific energy,



it is a universal umbilical cord. Like a baby in the mother's womb has an umbilical cord, we all also have an energetic umbilical cord that connects us to the Universal Mother, *prakriti*.

The mother's connection to the fetus is also through the placenta, which acts like a filter. Yet the umbilical cord is the source of energy and nutrition for the baby. Like that, we receive psychic nourishment through our "energy cord" into our navel center, the *manipura chakra*. This connection allows the Universal force to come into our system and from there it is directed to other parts of the body, depending on the function it has to perform (breathing, circulation, digestion, and so on).

In *sutra* 29 of *Vibhuti Pada*, the third section of the *Yoga Sutra*, Maharishi Patañjali<sup>10</sup> says *nabhichakre kayavyuhajnanam* (through deep concentration, meditation and absorption on the

<sup>10</sup> Maharishi Patañjali is one of the foremost of Indian sages whose life is interspersed with legendary stories of great mastery. He is the codifier of the *Yoga Darshan*, the *yogic* perspective of living as manifest in his *Yoga Sutra*, a series of aphorisms on *yoga* that give us the teachings of *ashtanga* and *kriya yoga* as a means to achieve *kaivalya*. He, like many seers of India, seemed to have lived for centuries and is believed to have lived more than 2500 years ago.

navel area, bodily arrangements are understood). Through *samyama* [concentration, meditation and absorption] on this wheel of energy, this spiral of energy, which exists in the navel, you gain the wisdom of the arrangement of the body. When the baby is being created, it is created through the navel. When you contemplate this

concept, you can slowly understand how the cells became the systems and the organs and, eventually, became “you.”

In the same manner, if we can contemplate the energy that connects us to the universal force, we can understand the whole role we have to play in it. We can discern the arrangement of our bodies, the sheaths of the *kosha*. We are understanding the fetus in the womb of the Mother!

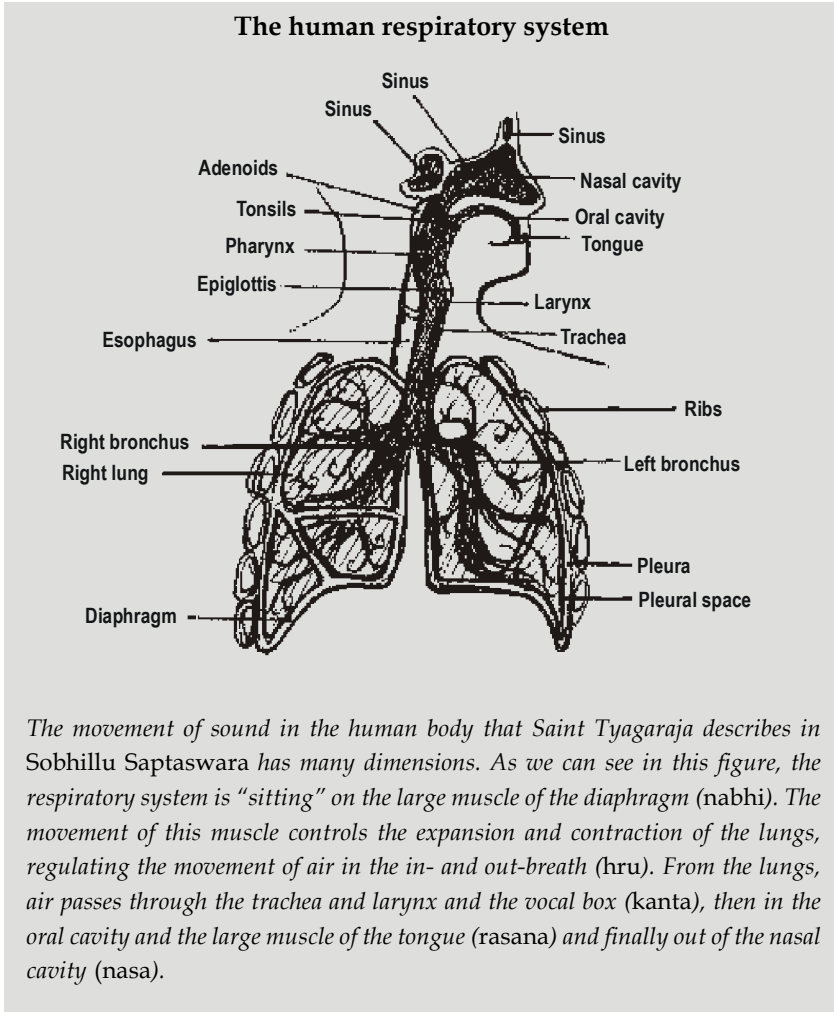
*S = What is the relationship between these concepts and Carnatic music?*

A = When we look at Carnatic music, we must talk about the great composer Tyagaraja.<sup>11</sup> In one of his compositions, he extols the concept of the *sapta swara*, the seven notes. He tells us that they are *shobhillu*,<sup>12</sup> which means “very beautiful.” He is not only referring to the physical beauty of each note, but also about the intrinsic power each one has to evoke and invoke certain energies. He talks about how music is produced, how it goes through different modulations as it comes out of the singer. In the *anupallavi*, the second part of this

<sup>11</sup> Tyagaraja, (1767 - 1847), “singer-saint”, composer of Carnatic music. Born in Tiruvarur, on the Kaveri river, a place whose musical associations go back to the time of Saint Sundaramurti Nayanar and where the three of the “Music Trinity” of Carnatic music, Tyagaraja himself, Syama Sastri, and Muttuswami Dikshitar, were all born. He composed thousands of devotional compositions, most of them in praise of Lord Rama. His compositions remain very popular even today. His musical compositions were written in Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Sanskrit (see Ramanujachari, 1958).

<sup>12</sup> The composition that Dr. Ananda is referring to is *Shobhillu Saptaswara*. The full text in Telegu, English translation and short commentary can be found in the Appendix II of the book.

composition, he tells us that the notes originate in the *nabhi*, the navel center. This area is also where the large muscle of the diaphragm is. Singing and speech are produced on an out-breath normally, by pushing air out through the vocal cords. Scientifically speaking, we breathe in and fully stretch the

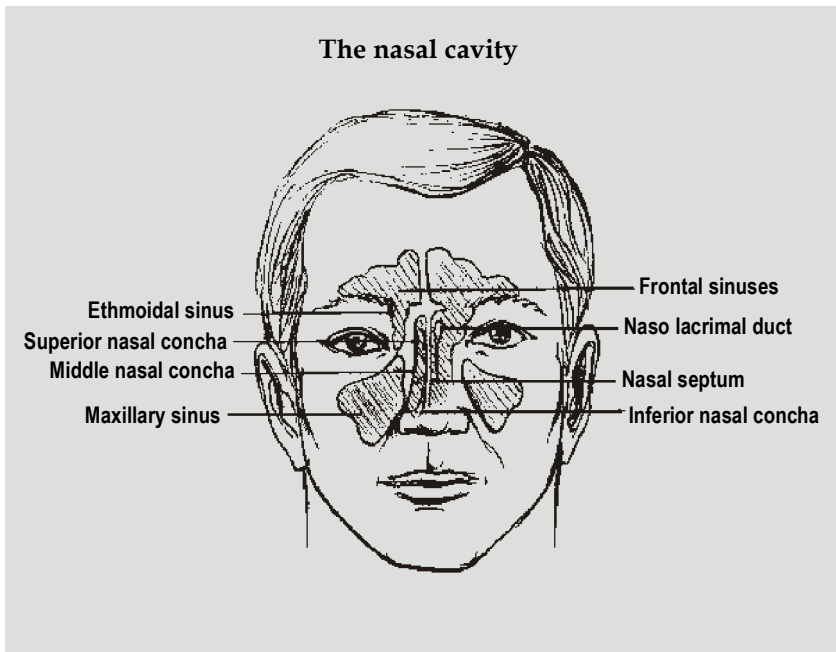


diaphragm. Then diaphragmatic relaxation occurs and we breathe out. This is the recoil which compresses the lungs, pushing the air out. This is where singing originates. Air is *vayu*, *vayu* is the vehicle for *prana*, *prana* is the energy.

This energy manifesting as air, coming from the low lungs, up through the chest, up the throat, and out through the nose. Tyagaraja tells us that *nabhi* is where the singing process starts and this is very scientific as well as psychic. Not only is *manipura* the center of creativity, passion and so on, it is also the area where physiologically, the whole process of sound starts.

From this area, Tyagaraja tells, sound moves through the heart, *hrudaya* (*hru*). Gross sound, in the heart area, becomes infused with emotion and feeling, a feeling of wanting to reach out and touch people. Emotions can be positive or negative: sound can heal and sound can hurt. Only then sound comes to the throat, *kanta*. Here is where sound is produced audibly but even before audible sound comes out of the vocal cords, it has been created and emotions have been added to it. Many people think that sound is produced in the head but actually these two processes have more of an “unconscious” nature. Just as we talk about the “unconscious” mind in the *chittavritti* (the whirlpools of subconscious thinking patterns), in the concept of *nadavritti* (the many waves of sound) sounds are generally produced by people with very little awareness. They may be infused with

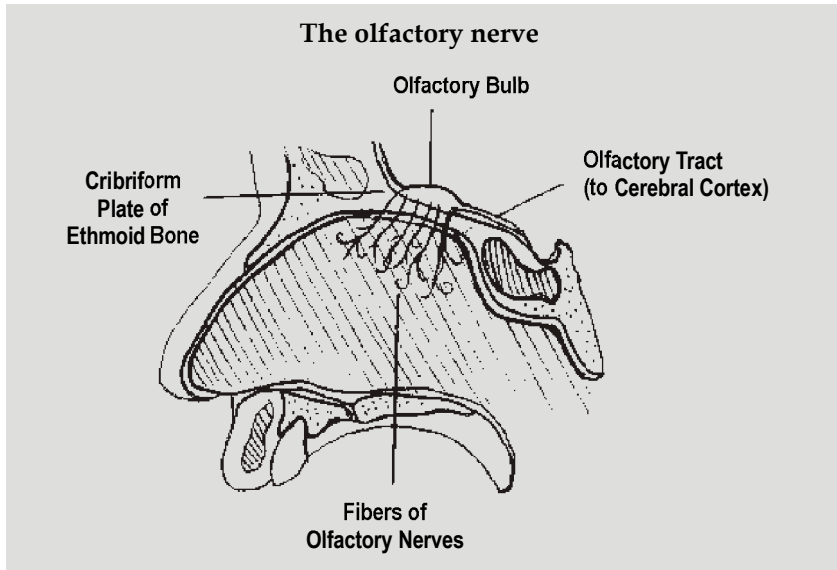
emotions but are often not mastered or used consciously. This is why people can do what they want without thinking; they can also say what they want without thinking. In the same way, there are people who sing but who are not in the least aware (nor interested) of how sound impacts them or the listeners. This can be termed “the spinal-cord mentality of music,” not a cortical level or intellectual level of music. At the level of the vocal cords, the *kanta*, sound is expressed and a certain level of consciousness comes into it. It is important that our energy centers, the *chakras*, are as clear as possible. We have already mentioned *manipura*, the wheel of energy at the solar plexus. The heart *chakra* is called *anahata* and the



throat *chakra*, *vishuddha*. *Vishuddha* means the “center of purity” and it should work properly, especially in regards to vocal communication. What the intention of the music is, will become manifest.

Next, Tyagaraja says, is the level of *rasana*, the essence. Its location is in the tongue through which you can articulate sounds and shape words. Subconscious sound has come to a conscious level and is produced. Now, with *rasana*, we can give this sound a “taste,” a form in which energy can flow. What is the essence of this energy? This also depends on the words. What are the lyrics about? What is the choice of the words used? Music should have purity even before the words are chosen. People think that lyrics make a song pure or not, but it does not really work like that. Nowadays people write lyrics and then “put them” to music but actually music is already there and the lyrics should be written to harmonize with the music. If I have some lyrics to work on, I let them run in my head for a while. Then, the music will come and the lyrics will add to it. It is like mistaking the movement of a sailboat on the ocean with the wave. The lyrics are the boat and the music is the ocean wave. You see the boat moving (as you hear the lyrics) but it is the wave that is supporting it (as it is music that supports words).

Finally sound travels through the nose, *nasa*. What is the nose? How is it made? What is its function? The inside top of the nose is like the top of a pyramid, or an upside down cone. Nature



did not create it like that because “it looks good.” Everything has a purpose. Pyramidal shapes, geometrically speaking, conjure a very strong energy. All world religions and spiritual traditions agree on this. Where does the top of the nasal pyramid, the spiraling cone end? Right in the front of the brain.

This is the physical seat that connects us to the Higher Consciousness. When the sound goes up to the nose, through this inner temple, we can offer it to the Highest. Interestingly, the sense of smell is the most primitive sense. The olfactory nerve runs at the top of the nasal cavity. This is the shortest of the cranial nerves, and this is why smell is a sense that gets to us very fast. It is such an important sense for any living being. Science tends to compartmentalize things and we may think that the olfactory nerve is only for smell, the optic nerve only

for sight and so on. Nature does not really work like this. When you talk and when you sing, the sonic vibration travels up to the top of the nose, resonating against its conical walls and sending information to the brain.

*S = Is this what is done in the practice of mantra laya, in which we sing the “seed” sounds of each chakra, the dhara bija?*

A = Yes, this is what we do. We pull the sounds from the root of our bodies in the sacral area up to this area in the upper part of the nose, so that vibrations can make that jump into the brain, and what is the best way to jump? Through the shortest of nerves! Slowly we can understand that music is not only pleasing to the ears, or to the heart, it can also take us to meditative awareness. The front of the brain, the fore brain is where a jump in evolution occurs. Then music becomes a vehicle for evolution.

*S = Is this also true for the listener?*

A = This is a difficult question. It depends a lot on how people are listening. Are people listening through the eyes or the ears? Indian music is a spectacle perceived, in fact, by all the senses. It depends a lot on each individual and their awareness. The audience has to be an active participant in the context of Carnatic music. The moment you are part of the music, by keeping the *talam* (the rhythmic time), waving the hands or the head and so on, you connect with the performers. I have



witnessed this when I listen to Sankaranarayanan Sir.<sup>13</sup> He sways and I start to sway, he is going for the high pitch and I feel I am going for the high pitch. Yet, this requires that you are “in tune” with the performer. If you are sitting there, trying to analyze how the singer is making mistakes, this won't happen! In the performers themselves, this process happens very often only unconsciously. The moment they realize it, they can make a jump from creating “good music” to creating “universal music,” from the mundane level to the spiritual level. If the performer cannot make this jump, the listeners won't either. It would be very difficult.

*S = How does Tyagaraja frame this process in the composition mentioned earlier?*

<sup>13</sup> Tiruvalangadu Vembu Iyer Sankaranarayanan (1945 - ), is an eminent Carnatic singer born in Tamil Nadu. He started to learn music from his uncle and *guru* Sangeetha Kalanidhi Madurai Mani Iyer. He has received many awards among which the Padma Bushan by the Government of India and the Sangeetha Kalanidhi by the Madras Music Academy stand out as testimony to his musical genius. His style of singing is loved and appreciated for the balance between technique and exquisite emotional rendering.

A= “With mindful heart and heartfelt mind sing the seven notes,” he says. Where do the notes come from? From the *Veda*, from the heart of the *Gayathri mantra*. All the Gods and human beings are part of this process, he says. See, this is a person who was not just “putting together” a few lyrics. He was someone who realized what he was singing, a person who understood how this process did

work. This is why the compositions of great singers stand out: they were composed in meditative states of ecstasy.

*S = They were received by the musicians.*

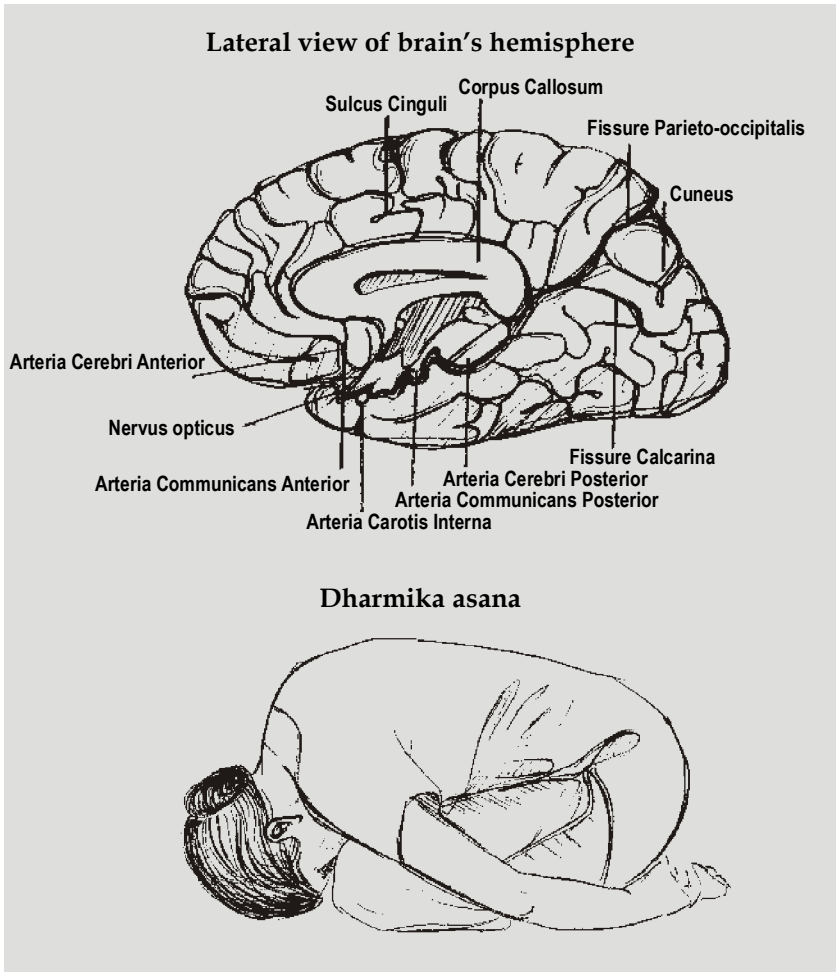
A = Yes, and there was never a feeling of possessiveness. No copyright or the idea that the songs belonged to the composers. Today we have many great technically-perfect musicians but this ecstatic aspect of composing is very rare if not totally absent. The “music market” is not allowing this aspect to survive. Tyagaraja really made the jump through his *bhakti* (devotion). He was totally and madly in love with Lord Rama, mad with his music, in his music, for his music!

My music master was one who understood the inner aspects of music. He would never eat before a concert because that would limit the diaphragmatic movement. If sound has to spring from this navel area and the energy of *manipura chakra* and the *samana vayu* is involved in digestion, what type of music are you going to make if you eat beforehand?

*S = Swamiji also commented on this often in regards to hatha yoga and pranayama practices: no eating before or even after the practices.*

A = Yes, never. One should preserve the freedom to channel energy towards the practice or towards music rather than

towards food. Originally, the concerts of Carnatic music would last many hours. Today, because of the modern setting, you are lucky if you get a one-hour concert. Yet, traditionally, artists had to master a great amount of energy spent not only to sing, but also to sit on the floor with the back straight and erect to allow the diaphragm to work properly. One should contemplate



these facts. The modern idea that singing comes from the vocal cords is so misleading. Singers are so focused on keeping the vocal apparatus in shape, they are so concerned about the lyrics, or the nasal twang and so on but, where does the music come from?

*S = How can yoga practices help us answer this question?*

*A = Many yoga practices are quite useful in this regard. The hakara kriya, for example, in which we stimulate the navel area by making the sound of “HA”; the pavana mukta kriya where we are stimulating this area, energizing and cleansing the internal organs and strengthening the diaphragm; the uddiyana bandha (navel lock) or the kukkriya pranayama (dog panting breath) are all practices that empower the same energy that propels sound upwards. Swamiji taught dharmika asana as the asana for manipura chakra. When you are in this asana you are not only working on the manipura, you are also developing a contemplative state of being. Energies such as passion, motivation and creativity will be combined with a higher mind, with “mind-full” awareness.*

*S = The whole process described by Tyagaraja is contained in this asana. From the nabhi to the nasa!*

*A = Yes. In dharmika asana unlike other asanas that are also labeled as “good for the manipura,” there is no waste of energy.*

Let's take *paschimottana asana*, for example, the forward bend of the torso, in a sitting position, over the stretched out legs. This *asana* is also very good for the stimulation of the abdominal area yet, Swamiji would say, a lot of energy is lost out through the stretched out legs. In *dharmika asana*, on the other hand, the legs are folded under the body, so automatically, energy is conserved. On top of that, you have your head down, folded to create a closed circuit of energy. Plus, there is a sense of devotion, *dharmika*. So the passion, the power, going with mindfulness towards the Highest. This *asana* opens us up to our limitless potentiality.

*S = When a person is in dharmika asana, the body shape is very similar to the shape, in side view, of a brain hemisphere.<sup>14</sup> May I also remark more fully on this?*

*Devotional singing can also "open us up to our limitless potentiality" by stimulating our bodies, emotions and minds. The physical body is stimulated by sonic vibrations and the higher mind by inspiration and an act of surrender to the Divine. When singing devotional songs one can embody the concept of being an instrument in the hands of the Divine. This is a metaphor that becomes a reality in the realm of music. One can literally be an instrument (by singing and chanting) and realize (make it real for one's self) this*

<sup>14</sup> I would like to thank Astrology and Philosophy Professor, Dr. Cesare Bartalesi, for teaching me this correspondence when I was his student in Florence, Italy, in 2007 - Sangeeta.

*concept, and once we are able to embody a concept, to become that concept, then we can more easily apply it to other spheres of our daily life.*

*Thus I can be an instrument in the hands of the Divine when singing, when teaching, when giving support to another, and when scrubbing the kitchen floor, without a judgment of the action's value. Ideally we can receive the gift of music-making as an opportunity to go beyond the identification with the "I", "mine", and "me."*

*This is also reflected in dharmika asana, as we bow to the Divine and welcome to opportunity to receive insights into the mystery of dharma.*

**III**

**Listening as a  
Tool for Purification**

# Listening as a Tool for Purification

*That which is not seen, but because of which the eyes are able to see; that which cannot be described by words, but because of which our speech is able to describe other things; that which is not heard by the ears, but because of which our ears are able to hear; that is Brahman.*

*Kena Upanishad (I: 4-7)*

*S = In your book, Understanding the Yoga Darshan, in the commentary of sutra 54 of Sadhana Pada, you describe the process of pratyahara as a process of “purification of the senses, making them the best they can before attaining control over them”.<sup>15</sup> You say “all the senses must be heightened, purified, and perfected to the best level. How does this apply to the senses of hearing and communication?”*

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani, *Understanding the Yoga Darshan* (Pondicherry, India: Dhivyananda Creations, 2011), p. 211.

*A = The basic message that we are looking at is a message of “right-use-ness”, righteousness, and this is basically what dharma is all about. If we are looking at dharma as doing the right thing, in the right way, for the right person, being in the right place at the right time, we see that we are creating a structure in which we can use in the proper way everything that we have been blessed with. Ancient Indian philosophy sees life as an opportunity to use rather than misuse or abuse our blessings. As human*



beings we have been blessed with the sensory apparatus, which means that it has a purpose, as there is a purpose for everything in nature.

*S = What is the purpose of the senses?*

A = Normally we talk of five senses of perception (*jnanendriya*: hearing, seeing, tasting, touching and smelling) but we should enlarge this view to include the five action senses (*karmendriya*) where we sense an action, either done through the feet, or the hands, or through communication or the reproductive and excretory systems. Then there is the super sense, the one sense, known as the *ekendriya*, the mind, that is the power behind these other ten. Swamiji has expanded this system to eighteen senses, including the sense of balance and the sense of empathy, bringing the senses to a realm of psycho-somatics rather than just anatomy and physiology.

The whole of music has to be approached in the same manner: music exists for a purpose. What is this purpose? Why do we have a sensory aspect, the ears (*shotra*) that can perceive sounds? The first point to make is that if we hear sounds, it is not by chance. It is not a “coincidence” that music exists and that we can hear it and enjoy it. We have both a signal and the right receptors for it. If I want to hear the program of a nice radio station, what do I do? I try to tune, as perfectly as possible, to its frequency. If I am rightly tuned, I will hear the program

crystal-clear. If I go a few millimeters one way or another, I may still hear it but there may be distortions and disturbances, static, and noise. There is music and there is noise. Music is when you tune perfectly to a frequency while noise is created as you deviate more and more from that “right” frequency. When you completely lose the frequency, only noise remains.

Our sensory apparatus is dealing with vibration, which means that it has a frequency. In order to perceive “reality” as “it is,” our sensory apparatus should be as clear and clean as possible, in order to tune into “what is” without distortions. Our ear in its physical structure is like the radio set, it is a “hardware”: it has a body made of the auditory canal, the eardrum, the three tiny bones and the muscles that move them, the nerves and so on. As the vibration enters the ear, the membrane of the eardrum is stimulated and it sends through nerves those impulses to the brain. Here, in the brain, the electric message is codified as sound (noise, speech, music, etc).

*S = What is implied in this process of codification and recognition of sound?*

A = It is in the brain that vibration is codified. In order to recognize anything, including sound, you must have experienced it earlier, you must have been exposed to it. This is why the first time you hear languages or a new type of music, you may not recognize them. This is another difference in our

perception of what is music and what is noise: recognition. It follows that if you are to appreciate music, you must become acquainted with it, open to it and familiarize with it. I could listen to *opera* and not understand why the singers are “shouting” at the top of their voice. If I open to understand what *opera* is, its development, history, forms and so on, I can start to appreciate it.

*S = Is it in the mind, in the ekendriya, that we shift from physiology and anatomy to abstract meaning? Where do vibrations become what we perceive as music?*

A = The brain is the hardware for our sensory apparatus. The brain decodes stimuli and places them in the right boxes. What are those boxes? This answer can only come from the mind. The more refined and sensitive humans become, the better they are able to understand music. It is only when we refine our sensory apparatus that we can start to hear “higher sounds.” Up to this point, we may not even hear them, let alone appreciate them.

*S = The actual process of refinement, however, is not limited to the sensory apparatus.*

A = Absolutely. The mind, the super sense, is now being deeply involved. In order to hear the very fine sounds of Carnatic music, for example, the receptor must be perfected. The

sensitivity of the neuronal connections that can “feel” these inputs must be heightened and only then the mind can try to understand and experience them.

*S = In general, the purification of the senses presents a challenge in modern times. More and more studies are being carried on in relation to “noise pollution” and how aggressive sounds are detrimental to our nervous system and general well being. We are constantly surrounded by loud sounds, especially in cities: cell phone rings, traffic sounds, engines, planes and so on. How can we clean and clear the sense of hearing? This purification seems to be part of a process of evolution of a person. Is it at this level where the study of music and yoga can become one?*

A = Yes, I am sorry to have to say this but the process of purification – not unlike the process of evolution – may take many lifetimes. You cannot say: “Ok, in this lifetime I am going to like refined music because it is good for me.” There are people who go to music teachers and tell them that they want to learn music. Sometimes they cannot even get into the pitch, they simply cannot hear it. There are people who are “tone deaf.” What is this about? In *yogic* terms, this is not only due to a physiological fact, it is also about the stage of “hearing evolution” of the person.

*S = How can we refine our hearing? By listening in a particular way or to particular sounds and styles of music?*

A = Yes, by exposing one's self to higher forms of music. I believe that the more people listen to classical Carnatic music, for example, the more they can refine their sense of hearing. Listening to classical music is a process of refining the senses because you are not looking for a momentary loud high, but experiencing something quiet and introspective, subtle, and very refined. In this process, we need to go from the outer to the inner, we need to go inside ourselves. Only at this point the transformation can occur.

*S = You talk about outer perception and then the action of reabsorption into a place of inner quiet. Is Carnatic music, in your experience, a musical form that allows the musician as well as the audience to embark on such a journey?*

A = Absolutely. After you come out of a concert, the music you heard should be resonating in your system for at least a few days. To make a pertinent example, the music in your system should be like one of those “up-grade” programs that you download on your computer: each time you listen, the music should upgrade your whole system. You are upgrading your sensory system. The first time you listen to this music you are not really sure what to make of it. The next time you listen to it, you may start to recognize the *ragam* or the *talam*. The next time you recognize a variation. The following time you begin to perceive the “mood” of that *ragam*, a certain emotion is created.

In the context of music-therapy in India, certain *ragam* are used to excite particular reactions. For example we have a *ragam* called *atana* that is used to stimulate heroism and valor, strength and the ability to develop a heroic nature. The first time you hear *atana*, however, those feelings may not be stimulated. If, over a period of time, you sensitize yourself to this *ragam* and the effects it has on you, its effects will increase. You have, in a sense, “upgraded your system.”

*S = Is this “upgrade” possible outside of its cultural framework? Do you think it is possible to feel the qualities of a ragam – the various emotional nuances of rasam – without knowing what these are in a specific culture? Is there something intrinsic in the numerical proportions of the note ratios of that ragam that would make the experience of valor palpable without knowing that atana is, culturally, the ragam used to invoke and evoke such a feeling?*

A = *Atana* will evoke valor, irrespectively of where you are from. It is not about a formality. It is more about how clearly you can perceive its message. We come back to the example of the radio station and of the receptor. It is about how precise your receptor is. You do not need to be Indian or to know that this is an Indian *ragam* or what it is called and so on. You just need to be able to listen to it. The wider is your capacity to really listen, the better chance you have to truly receive the messages of music. This is why the sensory apparatus has to be refined.

*S = Is Swamiji's shabda pratyahara<sup>16</sup> an example of yogic techniques that can help us in this process or refinement?*

A = Yes. In this *kriya* we are going “out” from within, trying to hear all the sounds that are outside, from the most dominant to the subtlest. Then we come back inside and start to hear inner sounds. We are testing the limits of our “sound mechanism.” Just as you stretch yourself in *asana*, we also can stretch our sense of hearing and our capacity to listen. We are taking up a challenge. A challenge strengthens us in many ways. With this *kriya* we must really expand the limits of our mechanism. We must learn to distinguish between the internal and external sounds. At this point we can begin to compare and contrast, and this is when you start to deepen your knowledge.

Music goes beyond this, however. Music lies in the gaps between sounds. It is not in the notes that music lies, but in the space between them. In the “silence” between *Ni* and *Sa*<sup>17</sup> you can create music. When you let go of sound, that's where music is. When you travel up and down the scale in a monotonous way, to practice, you are not making music. You need a space, a

<sup>16</sup> This *kriya* is in Swamiji's manual *Yoga Step-By-Step* and is reported in full in Appendix III.

<sup>17</sup> *Sa Ri Ga Ma Pa Da Ni* are the seven *swaras* (notes) of the Carnatic scale.

gap. It is a process of releasing. To go back to the concept of refinement, in the study of the *swara*, you need to first know the notes. There is no real movement

at this point, only the memorization of tone and utterance. Then you can start to look at the movement. Only then you can start to discern that “unspoken note.” This is not only a concept present in Carnatic music. In *yoga* we learn that Sri Dakshinamurti<sup>18</sup> is the teacher who teaches in silence, through silence. He does not speak to his students. That is the peak of teaching. How can they hear him? They have to be sensitive enough. To be a disciple was not so easy traditionally. The students had to be *adhikarin*, “fit to become the highest.” Today students are so impatient and easily bored by the slow process of evolution. Learn to hear sounds, and then learn to hear silence.

*S = What is silence?*

A = Silence is the peak of music. To be able to hear what is in the silence we need a very evolved sensory mechanism. When we hear drumming the impact is immediate on a sensual level. Yet, when we need to hear silence, we must truly know how to listen.

Maharishi Patañjali<sup>19</sup> defined *yoga* as *chittavritti nirodha*, the cessation of the whirlpools of the

<sup>18</sup> Sri Dakshinamurti is regarded to be a *guru avatara*, the incarnation as a guru or spiritual master, of Lord Shiva (see Tejomayananda, 1993-50).

He is the blissful youthful teacher who sits facing the southern direction and teaches in silence to his four aged disciples gesturing consciousness with the *chin mudra*.

<sup>19</sup> Maharishi Patañjali is one of the foremost of Indian sages whose life is interspersed with legendary stories of great mastery. He is the codifier of the *Yoga Darshan*, the *yogic* perspective of living as manifest in his *Yoga Sutra*, a series of aphorisms on *yoga* that give us the teachings of *ashtanga* and *kriya yoga* as a means to achieve *kaivalya*. He, like many seers of India, seemed to have lived for centuries and is believed to have lived more than 2500 years ago.



mind. We can apply this concept to subtle musical forms and define them as *nadavritti nirodha*, the cessation of the notes' whirlpools. When you take all the notes out, what remains? We must learn to listen from the grossest sounds (the lower speeds of vibration), to the subtlest (the higher speed of vibration) and, finally, to the sound of silence or the silence in sound which is the causal level of vibration.

I had this experience many times when I heard great singers. They would launch in a *ragam* and then let it go and be quiet for a few seconds. In this gap, "All" happens. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna teaches Arjuna about the principle of making an effort and then letting it go. In *yoga* we call this release *nishpanda* (action/movement is *spanda*, the audible notes). In the letting go, manifestation occurs.

*S = The process of refinement which allows us to be able to perceive subtler levels of manifestation, including sound, is a daily practice that requires effort, concentration and perseverance. Yet, as in other forms of yoga, we cannot "will" evolution. We can make a commitment to evolve and to refine the self with various practices and the adherence to moral and ethical standards, with careful listening, with awareness of how we listen as well as what we choose to listen to.*

*To be able to access the subtle planes of music that you are referring to, cannot be willed. The process is a "boon" that we*

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may receive – after much practice, perseverance, and commitment.

A = I love this word, a “boon.” It is absolutely true. Nothing in Indian culture has ever been something that you get, or grab, or you swipe your credit card and buy. Not at all. It is something that needs to come to you, it has to happen. In one of our Tamil scriptures it is said: “*Even to worship the feet of the Divine, you need the blessings of the Divine.*” To even pray to the Divine, you need the blessings of the Divine!

My music master taught me this. He used to say that every concert is a test. Even the greatest of singers, he said, cannot say: “*Today I will go on stage and it will be a great concert.*” After the concert you can evaluate, but never before. You can only do your best, but there is much more to a performance. Something has to come “through” you, that boon you were referring to, that *vara prasadam* (a boon from the Divine). When we perform in temples or in the *Madam*, for example, the feeling of the concert is quite different than when the performance is on an auditorium or theatre stage. These arts were never “staged:” they were temple arts. The whole point was to make the best effort possible to prepare one’s self and then go to the temple and offer the effort to the Divine. Only then one can open to receive *prasadam*, the boon, a gift from the Divine. The difference is that a modern performer will concentrate so much on the form: how long he or she can hold

the note, the technical skills, the appearance and so on. Carnatic music is not about the notes: it is about going beyond the notes.

*S = In the modern attempt to re-create a dialogue between ancient spiritual traditions and modern science, such as quantum physics, visual examples are often used. We learn that what seems to be a vacant space between you and I (I see your body there and my body here and between us there is a "void") is, in fact, filled with vibratory activity. Can we apply this understanding to the field of sound by saying that the space around and inside of us is filled with sonic vibrations even though we may not be able to hear them?*

A = There is an ancient oriental saying that applies to this point:

*We join spokes together in a wheel, but it is the center hole, that makes the wagon move.*

*We shape clay into a pot, but it is the emptiness inside, that holds whatever we want.*

*We hammer wood for a house, but it is the inner space, that makes it livable.*

*We work with being, but non-being is what we use.*

This is something very similar. You work with notes like you work with bricks to build a house but are you going to live inside the bricks? The same is valid for music making. Use the notes, craft them, polish them, and create a beautiful structure with them. Then, enter their space and enjoy the music. In Indian spiritual arts as well as in *yoga* you do certain things so that you can go beyond them: you create music so that you can go beyond its sounds, you create dance so that you can beyond its forms, you apply yourself to *asana* so that you can contemplate the infinite from a steady and comfortable point of stillness. The goal is not in the form. Maharishi Patañjali in the *Yoga Sutra* teaches us this: go through the eight limbs of *Ashtanga Yoga* so that you can finally let go and be liberated.

One should not assume the modern (and lazy) interpretation of this message as meaning that one should not do anything. People can say: “If music is in the silence, why should I study? I can just be quiet and that would be just fine.” Or in regards to *yoga*, one could argue that if *asana* is to be still and comfortable, one might as well lie on the couch! Sorry, but this is not an acceptable interpretation!

*S = One has to master technique to go beyond it. The whole process revolves around a sustained effort, not around the final goal. The final goal comes on its own accord. Are the techniques the purifiers?*

A = Yes. When you go through the technique you purify your many systems. With sound, for example, through sustained practice, you slowly learn to identify the *shruti*, the pitch. Only through technique this can happen. Slowly then you identify each note and learn where they “live,” which “address” they have, who can visit who and then come back to their original position. In a certain *ragam*, *Da* can travel up to *Sa* and come back a few times. This movement is not only possible but necessary in such a *ragam*. You need to know that. Then, you have the freedom to go beyond it. In the same manner, you need to know which note can change “address” according to various specific *ragam*.

We should be careful not to bring these teachings down to the level of the intellectual and spiritual laziness that most people live in. In the *yoga* world today, for example, *yoga* has been identified with *asana*. Why? Because people can see it. You can put up a nice picture in a magazine, make a video and put it on *youtube* and *facebook* and have many people comment on what a great *yogi* you are! What a superficial and incorrect understanding of *yoga* this is! Yet, the majority of people in the world can only see or hear up to a certain level of vibration. The rest is not perceivable to them. Only very few people are able and willing to make the effort to hear silence.

*S = Sri Dakshinamurti is portrayed with four chelas (disciples) after all, not with forty-thousand, like most “modern gurus.”*

A = Yes, no wonder the type of sensitivity required for these practices is not popular. People talk about “popularizing” classical music. It is not possible because people do not want to be refined! My *natya guru* Lakshman Sir<sup>20</sup> was making this point, as well. There is a trend, he said, of wanting to bring the classical dance and music art forms of Southern India “down” to the masses. Why not bring the “masses” “up there,” where this music resonates, instead? It is quite difficult because there are so many elements needed: self-effort, commitment, capacity to let go of results, humility, strength, capacity to receive blessings and so on. How many people will possess these qualities?

To be a good artist, to be a good musician, you have to be a good human being. Technique is not enough. It is only the “human-ness” that can push us beyond technique in our path to “Divine-ness.” There are people out there who can sing good music mechanically, without a soul behind it. They are popular,

<sup>20</sup> Natya Kalanidhi  
Natya Kala Ratna  
Shironmani Padmashri  
Kalaimamani *Guru* Sri Adyar  
K. Lakshman (1933 - ) is the  
*Bharatanatyam* dance *Param*  
*Guru* of Yoganjali  
Natyalayam, having been the  
*Guru* to Kalaimamani  
Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani  
as well as Dr. Ananda  
Balayogi Bhavanani and his  
wife Smt Devasena  
Bhavanani.

they sell thousands of copies of their albumns, they are on magazines. The purpose of art, however, is not that. The purpose of art is to allow us humans to achieve “Divineness.” That is the real purpose, and unless art elevates us, unless it transforms

us, unless it enables us to make that “quantum jump” in evolution, it is not art. It may be nice to the senses, but one should not call it art.

In *yoga* the concept is the same. The *asana* can be perfect. One can hold in and out the breath for many counts. Is this *yoga*? One can memorize the full text of the *Yoga Sutra* and chant it in the most perfect *Vedic* intonation. Is this *yoga*? A book contains the *Yoga Sutra*, so how are you better than a book? You can create a clay model of an *asana*, so how are you better than a clay model? The same for music: a CD can contain the best performance of a *ragam*, so if you sing mechanically, how are you better than a CD? The whole idea is that we need to refine our being, and our sensory apparatus is part of our being. We must embark on a journey from the grossest to the subtlest, all the way back to the causal and finally let go of the effort and rest in silence. *That is where music truly starts.*

**IV**

**Guru-Chela**



## Guru-Chela

*S = As a Yogacharya (yoga master), a Carnatic music singer, a mridungam player, and Bharatanatyam dancer and composer, what has the role of the guru meant to you in your experience?*

A = The *guru* spirit is one. Yet the *guru* may manifest at different times through different forms. The role of true *gurus* is to help us evolve. They want the best for us even when we don't know what is best for ourselves. The *guru* can only lead us on the path and guide us towards the goal. Don't expect your *gurus* to carry you on their shoulders!

We can learn from many sources and we can grow as a result but the dedication towards the *guru* needs to

be focused. A *guru* is not just an instructor, guide or teacher. A *guru* is the one who enables us to realize our innate divinity. This transformation requires us to have a very personal and deep relationship with the *guru*. “*Guru-shopping*” and “*guru-hopping*” are not good for one's growth. Most people change *gurus* because their present *guru* is too hard on them. They want a loving, caring *guru* who doesn't offend them in any way. A digger of wells digs deep in one place and finds water. So does a miner. A puddle digger digs

many holes but ends up with nothing but puddles. Similarly it is not wrong to explore many styles but it may be better to commit to one tradition and go deep into it if we really want to live and love *yoga*. Each

tradition has its own logic. A “cafeteria approach” in taking techniques from different traditions and mixing them together may not always produce the same benefits as using the same practices within the framework of one tradition. Do feel free to explore, but then attempt to settle down with one.

*S = How has the experience of being born to illustrious parents and gurus been for you?*

A = I owe everything in my life to my dearest and most revered *gurus*, my darling illustrious parents, Swamiji, Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri and Ammaji, Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani. Without them I would be nothing at all. They have given me both my physical as well as my spiritual genetics thus enabling me to manifest my potential as best possible in this lifetime.

It is a great privilege for me to have been born to Swamiji and Ammaji, and to have grown up in an atmosphere like the one at Ananda Ashram. It was a privilege that I can only explain in terms of positive *karma* from my past lives. To Swamiji, everything was *yoga*. It wasn't something you got up in the

morning to do, or something you did in the evening, the entire day was *yoga*. Whatever you did was *yoga*. He set up a routine that we are still practicing during the International Six Months *Yoga Teacher's Training*: you got up at four-thirty in the morning and you would find students sitting for meditation, if you went at six o'clock you would find *hatha yoga* classes under the big tree, if you went at eleven o'clock they would be doing *pranayama*, if you went around in the afternoon you would find classes on the therapeutic aspects of *yoga (yoga chikitsa)*, and in the evenings there would be *mantra* chanting followed by *satsangha* that often stretched into the late night. The entire day, wherever you looked, there was something going on and to learn. In addition to that, hundreds of local children used to come to Ananda Ashram on Sundays. They would receive free food and clothing, and this was done in order to entice them to *yoga*. There had to be a pull to get them to come and then once they did, the *yoga* took over. We had children who came here from every level of Indian society, the rich and the poor and from all religions. There was no way that I could escape that atmosphere's influence on me, and I knew that I had been put there for a definite purpose.

At the age of four, I was officially named as my father's successor. Many people asked what a four-year-old could know or understand, but I recall the occasion vividly. I was then not only exposed to *yoga*, but also to *mantra* chanting through a Sanskrit *pandit* who taught me different *mantras* from the

*Vedas*. When I was 12 years old I had to go to school because I had to have an official education. My teachers thought that I would be uneducated but they didn't realize that my elder sister Yogacharini Renuka Giri taught me mathematics, and my mother English, general knowledge, geography and history. I also had a local tutor who taught me Tamil, and a *pandit* who taught me Sanskrit. I had received all the education that I needed so when I went to school I did very well, and was always easily at the top of my class. I tell the children I now teach that I was lucky to have been spared that 'so-called' education because I grew up in an atmosphere where I was exposed to real life. We also had a small zoo at the *ashram*, and so I grew up with monkeys, deer, foxes, mongooses, ducks, and rabbits running around. It was an atmosphere where concepts simply entered my young head effortlessly and in a natural way.

*S = How did you learn with Swamiji?*

*A=* People often ask me if I learned "special" teachings from him. Swamiji didn't have to do anything "special" for me because each moment with him was a learning experience. I didn't always understand what he taught me, but it still made an impression. Those memories stayed in my thoughts so that when I want to call upon them, they are there. I think that consciously and unconsciously I was imbibing everything from my environment - I was practicing and taking part in classes, and even teaching if necessary. Ammaji encouraged me to sit

down every month and to write a one-page article about *yoga*. I wrote about different *asanas* with Ammaji correcting my English, and we published a small book “*Yoga for Children*” from my writings when I was eleven years old.

*S = Did you ever study like a regular student at the Ashram?*

*A=* Yes, in 1991-1993 after finishing my schooling, I studied with my father just as a normal student would at Ananda Ashram (ICYER). I learnt a lot of what I needed to know in those two years. It is said, ‘When the student is ready, the teacher appears; and at that point I was ready to absorb his teaching. I began to realize the systematic codification of his *Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga* teaching, and how all his teaching was interlinked. All the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle from my childhood experiences came together.

During this time, I lived with him, so there was always the opportunity to talk to him about my questions. We would often have conversations after *satsanga* where we would sit up late into the night. In those talks he didn’t teach me magical things or tell me secrets about special techniques. What he said was always very practical. He taught me that the brain has a certain capacity, and that we should not waste it by filling it with useless knowledge. He said that I should know where to look for something when I wanted it; in that way I wouldn’t have to try to learn everything. He said that I should know which book and chapter to refer to, instead of trying to learn the entire book.

He made me think about how I was going to link my studies at medical college with *yoga*. In those two years of formal training he taught me and prepared me for what I would face in my five years of medical studies. He influenced my view of the science of medicine and of *yoga*. A doctor trained in “the system” would view *yoga* within the limitations of modern medicine, while Swamiji taught me to look at allopathic medicine without limitation. Those two years gave me a perspective that I did not have before, and it helped me to see what it was I had to do. I could see the greatness of his teaching and of him, and it helped me to firmly decide to continue his work.

*S = Would you share some of the perspectives on life that you have learned from your father and your mother?*

*A= Everything I know is what he and my mother have given me and I am nothing without their grace. They have taught me to do my best and leave the rest. They have taught me that we must live for the sake of humanity and not just to gratify our ego. They have taught me to love life and look at the big picture for it is all about perspective. They have taught me that life is fun. They have blessed me with an understanding of my real universal nature and have given me the tools to reunite with myself through *yoga*. What else can I ever ask for?*

Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* tells us he will place into the wombs of *yoginis* those who have not fulfilled their purpose

in the present incarnation, thus enabling them to do so in the next (*praapya punyakritaam lokaanushitwaa shaashwateeh samaah shucheenaam shreemataam gehe yogabhrashto' bhijaayate - 6:41*). *Yoga* is my very being.

*S = There seems to be the trend, nowadays, that those who attend a couple of yoga classes call themselves yogis. Who is a yogi or yogini?*

*A = Many years ago, Swamiji and Ammaji were returning after a long world tour and decided to make a list of the ten top yogic personalities they had met on that long tour. At the end of the whole exercise, it was most surprising to find that not even one of the top ten was a “practicing yogi”! Generally, Indians seem to have yoga built into their genes whether they know it or not. Scratch any Indian and you will find a yogi hidden inside. However we take our cultural heritage for granted and will not appreciate “that” which is right in front of us. We lack a sense of discipline and easily fall back on the crutch of “it’s my karma.” On the other hand, I find Western yoga students more disciplined and capable of greater intellectual analytical understanding. Yet, they are limited by the lack of a typical Indian understanding of universal connective-ness and don’t have the benefit of cultural concepts that have been around for thousands of years. Ultimately a good student transcends every barrier and every limitation.*

*Yoga* has to be practiced with “every-moment awareness” and we must make a constant and uninterrupted effort towards being in the NOW if we are to truly live *yoga*. Of course, before we attain any of these states of awareness, we first need to be aware of how unaware we are. Waking up is not always pleasant but it is important. For the *yogi*, *yoga* is something to be lived until the last breath, and even that last breath should be completed with awareness.

*S = “Yoga is a way of life,” as Swamiji used to say...*

*A =* There are so many seekers who want the “highest” states of awareness and consciousness but lack the basic common sense awareness of even their words and actions let alone their thoughts and emotions. Many of them are virtually standing on the toes of their *guru*, demanding that they be given the highest state. This is where the real *guru* does need to sometime “whack” some good common sense into the student if they are to wake up. However many modern *gurus* are afraid of having their students wake up, as they will then lose them. Swamiji told us that a “breakdown” is often an opportunity for a “break through.” Often illness and disease is also a “wake up call” from nature telling us we need to wake up and start living properly.

*S = During one of your classes in the Ashram, you talked about “guru ratings” on the internet. What is this new phenomenon?*



A = I was absolutely stunned recently to see that we now have “guru ratings” on the net! Your *guru’s* position on the charts can depend on how many devotees/students/disciples/fans they have and how many organizations they run worldwide. Their political and financial clout can also help them get a better rating. DVD and book sales figures are equally important. Modern *gurus* seem to call out: “Come to me and I will save you!” without letting the students ever come to know that none can save them, except themselves.

Lord Krishna, also known as Yogeshwar, the Lord (master teacher) of *yoga* would be an utter failure in such a rating. He says in the *Bhagavad Gita*, “Of thousands of people only one desires me and of the thousands who desire me only one attains me!” (*manushyaanaam sahsreshu kaschith yathathi siddhaye yathathaam api siddhaanaam kasschin maam vetthi thathvathah - 7.3*). To put that in figures, only one in a million gets to him! Such an abysmal failure Krishna would be as a *guru* in modern ratings indeed!

S= *What was Swamiji’s view on “being” a guru?*

A= Swamiji used to say, “I don’t want to create followers, I want to create leaders who can lead themselves and others towards *moksha*!” He would further extol his students to work on becoming a *guru* to themselves by finding the inner *guru* spirit, the *guru sakshat* (the inner observer and witness). Swamiji would kick off anyone trying to cling on to his feet saying, “It is not my duty to carry you: you need to carry yourself.”

The *dharma* (sacred and righteous duty) of a *guru* is to help the students find themselves. If we understand the role of the *guru* in these terms, the most successful *guru* by these lofty standards is the one left with no disciples at all, as they have all attained *moksha*! What a far cry from the modern “*guru-ratings*”!

S= *What was Swamiji's relationship to his guru?*

A = When Swamiji took *diksha* (spiritual initiation), his *guruji* Swami Kanakananda<sup>21</sup> handed him a poem written in his own handwriting as a “gift.” It was entitled *A String of Pearls*. In Swamiji's own words, “As I read through it, I came to understand the role of the real *guru* in life. My heart swelled outwards in manifestation of this realization and I jotted my

<sup>21</sup> Yogamaharishi Swami Kanakananda Brighu was the *yoga guru* of Swami Gitananda Giri. He codified the teachings of *mantra*, *yantra* and *tantra* that are today part and parcel of the *Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga* tradition taught at ICYER. He is mentioned in Swami Yogananda's book, *Autobiography of a Yogi* as Ram Gopal Muzumdar, the sleepless saint. He left his mortal coil on the 26th of October, 1967, and his *jayanthi* is celebrated every year on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February with a special *homa* ceremony after a whole night of nonstop *AUM* chanting.

first poem on the back of his paper. That poem was *The Gentle Jeweller*, and was written on my thirteenth birthday.”

This poem well expresses the sublime love between master and disciple.

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## A STRING OF PEARLS

(R.G.M.) *Swami Kanakananda Brighu*

In consciousness I view the band  
Of Faithful who around me stand.  
With knowledge deep that I alone  
Can join these scattered gems in one:  
For they're a wreath of pearls, and I  
The silken cord on which they lie.

Tis mine their innermost soul to see.  
Unlocked is every heart to me.  
To me they cling, on me they rest  
And I've a place in every breast:  
For they're a wreath of pearls, and I  
The silken cord on which they lie.

## THE GENTLE JEWELLER

(A. B.) *Swami Gitananda*

In consciousness, we feel you near  
With you, there's Peace Eternal here,  
Such tenderness floods O'er each one,  
This Infinite Love withheld from none.  
We may be gems, unhewn it's true.  
The Gentle Jeweller. Friend, are you.

With gladness, hearts are opened wide,  
That you may come and look inside,  
Teach us how to mend our ways  
And serve you best for all our days:  
We may be gems, unhewn it's true.  
The Gentle Jeweller, Friend, are you.

*S = What is one of the most important teachings you have learned from Swamiji's relationship with his guru, Swami Kanakananda Brighu?*

A = I would say there are three major lessons I have learnt from an objective analysis of the deep, loving and intimate relationship that existed between Swamiji and his *guru*:

1. Truth is not always absolute;
2. *Guru bhakti* is the supreme attribute necessary for self-realization;
3. Time is relative and wisdom infinite.

The first lesson that “Truth is not always absolute” is well illustrated by a story Swamiji used to tell us on the night of February 2<sup>nd</sup> when we would sit for the all night *AUM* chanting before performing the *homa* (fire oblations) in honor of his *guru's jayanthi* (birth anniversary) on the morning of February 3<sup>rd</sup> every year.

Swamiji's *guru* at one point in his life used to live in a cave in the mountains and one day had an old clawless, toothless near-dead tigress took shelter in his cave. This developed into a symbiotic relationship with the *guru* keeping the tigress alive by feeding her while she kept him warm as a sleeping rug during the cold nights. A student who was living with the *guru* was aware of this “strange” and unique relationship and had

learnt to live with it as he was grateful for the *guru's* teachings. Many months later, a wild tiger attacked some villagers and made off with their livestock. This led to a horde of angry villagers armed with weapons coming up to the cave one day while Swami Kanananda was doing his daily *sadhana* and asking him whether he had seen any man-eating tigers in the vicinity. "We want to kill this menace before we are all killed" they chorused. Swami Kanananda smiled and said, "I haven't seen any man-eating tigers around here but will let you know if I do." Relieved at his benign words and blessings the villagers tramped away. Once they had passed the horizon the young student jumped up in indignation and shouted, "*Guruji* you are a liar, you lied to them! There is a tiger in our cave and you hid the truth! What is the use of preaching *yama-niyama* if you are not going to follow them yourself?" Swami Kanananda just smiled and retorted, "You are such a dumb idiot. There is no man-eating tiger in our cave. That thing over there is just my warm, winter sleeping rug."

This story teaches us a deep lesson. If Swamiji had said, "Yes, there is a tigress in the cave, but....." even before he would have completed the sentence the poor tigress would have been killed by the villagers who would never have understood that "this" was not "The Tiger" they were looking for! What the word "tiger" meant to the villagers was something very different than what this tigress "was" in reality. Yet to the undeveloped

mind, both seem the same. The villagers and the student could only see the external form while *guruji* understood the essence of the reality.

The second lesson I have learnt from the relationship between Swamiji and his *guru* is that *guru bhakti* is the supreme attribute necessary for self-realization. I have witnessed the immense *bhakti* Swamiji had for his *guru* and feel that it is this very reverence for his master that enabled him to become a realized master himself. In *dhyana* (meditative awareness) we become ONE with the object of our contemplation and thus when one has a focused, uplifting, undivided, loving dedication towards one's *guru*, one becomes the *guru* himself. Every quality of the *guru* upon which the devout *chela* (disciple) concentrates becomes a living quality in them, too. In my opinion, Swamiji truly became a living manifestation of his *guru* Swami Kakananda and as a result all the teachings became "His Whole Being." I feel this has now also happened with Ammaji as she has indeed become a living manifestation of Swamiji through her unsurpassed *guru bhakti*.

The third lesson I have learned is that time is relative and wisdom infinite. Swamiji lived with his *guru* for only six or seven years and that too at a tender, young age. Yet the amount of knowledge and wisdom he had surpassed anything that any human being could gain in many lifetimes of conscious living. I feel that as one rises in consciousness, time starts to slow

down and finally stops still in the moment, in the NOW. This reminds me of the great teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* that were given to Arjuna by Lord Krishna as the two massive armies waited for battle. Time was eternal for Krishna and Arjuna and hence the teachings which are vast and infinite could be imparted in a moment when time stood still. For the armies on either side this same time span must have seemed to be a few minutes or half an hour at most. This moment, this NOW is what Maharishi Patañjali<sup>22</sup> calls the *kshana* and can range from an infinitesimally small nanosecond to an entire lifetime! In “that” state of being, one taps into the cosmic *akashic* record, the cosmic universal matrix and all knowledge is obtained (*sarvajnatritvam*). Swamiji was living proof of this truth and I am convinced that he and Swami Kakananda had a similar experience to what Krishna and Arjuna had with regards to the *Bhagavad Gita*’s teachings. To us it seems to be a short period of merely six or seven years, while to them it was “timeless.” They went beyond time and attained that highest universal wisdom as a result of being All-One!

*S = What is one of the most important teachings you have learned from the relationship between Ammaji, your mother and dharmapatni (life spiritual companion) of her guru, Swamiji, your father?*

<sup>22</sup> Maharishi Patañjali is one of the foremost of Indian sages whose life is interspersed with legendary stories of great mastery. He is the codifier of the *Yoga Darshan*, the *yogic* perspective of living as manifest in his *Yoga Sutra*, a series of aphorisms on *yoga* that give us the teachings of *ashtanga* and *kriya yoga* as a means to achieve *kaivalya*.

A = I have seen them illustrate in day-to-day life that love is indeed profound interest. I have seen the deep respect and love they shared in bringing out the very best in each other. I have learnt the importance of valuing the other person in a relationship and giving them 'space' to grow and evolve. I have learnt responsibility and how life is pure magic, joy and even Divine ecstasy. I have learned the importance of trusting your team, for they either make or break you. Interpersonal evolutionary empowerment is what they both shared. Their relationship was a Divine one, one that was undoubtedly made in the heavens and enacted on this place of existence for the benefit of humanity. They showed me that stick-ability is one of the most important qualities in any relationship and that no matter what happened, they always stayed together irrespective of any differences that automatically arise when two "one of a kind" personalities come together to share their lives in such an intense manner. This was indeed a cosmic union and loving selflessness was surely and truly the core of their relationship. There was never any one up-man-ship in their relationship and though there were many tough times, they proved that "every challenge that doesn't kill you only makes you stronger"! I have realized that one of the most important aspects of my *dharma*, is to make sure that their union, despite it being a controversial relationship at many levels, is proved to be the best of all through my life and my living. I live my life every day with gratitude to them and as my heartfelt tribute to the best parents I have ever known!



*S = You started playing mridangam at an early age and also to take Carnatic vocal classes at the same time as you were growing up in the ashram. How was the relationship with your music guru?*

*A = My music and dance gurus, Srirengam Shri*

<sup>23</sup> Nada Yoga Shironmani, Kalaimamani Srirengam Thiru R. Ranganathan (1924-2001) was a highly respected Carnatic music master who served as staff artist of All India Radio, Pondicherry for many decades. He was the Carnatic vocal music master to Dr. Ananda, Smt Devasena Bhavanani, Smt Jyothirmayi and many others through Yoganjali Natyalayam.

<sup>24</sup> Laya Jnana Shironmani, Tiruvarur Sri R. Krishnamurthy (1939 - ) is a highly respected *Mridungam* master who served as staff artist of All India Radio, Pondicherry for many decades. He is *mridungam guru* of Dr. Ananda and is uncle and *guru* to the world famous *mridungam* maestro, Tiruvarur Bhaktavatsalam.

<sup>25</sup> Natya Kalanidhi, Natya Kala Ratna Shironmani Padmashri Kalaimamani Guru Sri Adyar K. Lakshman (1933 - ) is the Bharatanatyam dance Param *guru* of Yoganjali Natyalayam, having been the *guru* to Kalaimamani Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani as well as Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani. Ammaji's writing on her relationship to him, *The Epitome of a True Guru*, is the subject of the Appendix IV.

R. Ranganathan,<sup>23</sup> Tiruvaroor Shri R. Krishnamurthy<sup>24</sup> and Adyar Shri K. Lakshman<sup>25</sup> are an integral part of my life. They have been in my life from such a young age that I really have no 'before and after' comparative perceptions with regard to their role in my life. I am 'what I am' thanks to my *gurus*, nothing else. They have poured great love, affection and teachings into me with such dedication and devotion to the fine arts that I feel truly and richly blessed. They are indeed human manifestations of the Divine as far as I am concerned. They are selfless, generous, endless reservoirs of the universal artistic wisdom. I will always consider myself a member of their family and remember with fondness all the special moments I have shared

with them. Loving, yet hard taskmasters; yes, they have been that. Hard words when needed and soft ones too, that has been their teaching to me. To strive for perfection has been their message and to bath in an orgasmic ocean of divine vibration has been the inner experience. They are indeed my foster parents for they have motivated, enhanced, facilitated and stimulated my artistic growth with parental pride and affection. Interestingly I have also shared similar relationships with my dear teachers at school and professors at medical school. Each and every one of them has been an inspiration to me.

*S = The guru is a principle embodied in a person rather than the actual person. So does the role of the guru change according to the teachings (yoga versus music) or are there similarities?*

A = The *guru* is one. The teachings needed by different students may be different and may be given in differing ways and in differing situations. However, the only aim is really to foster growth of the spirit. Expansion is the goal. This is an expansion from a limited, finite individuality to an unlimited, infinite universality. It doesn't matter whether it is music, *yoga* or dance, the *guru* just wants the best to flower through their students. And, they help to make it happen. Swami Satchidananda<sup>26</sup> so rightly

<sup>26</sup> Swami Satchidananda (1914-2002), was one the great *yoga* masters of modern times. He was born in Tamil Nadu, India, and traveled quite extensively, teaching and authoring many books. He coined the term *Integral Yoga* and founded *Yogaville*, a renowned *yoga* center and international organization based in Virginia, U.S.A. ([www.yogaville.org](http://www.yogaville.org))

said, “Don’t try to get the teacher into your heart; instead, get the teaching into your heart. Keep it there, and you will feel your master’s presence and guidance always.”

*S = What are the qualities of a good student?*

A = Dedication, devotion and unswerving faith in the *guru tattva* are most essential. Intelligence, heart-head interconnectivity coupled with an ability to look at one’s self with *vairagya*, and an insatiable desire to grow in spirit are secondary prerequisites. Talent is only tertiary.

*S = What is the “guru tattva?”*

A = Each of the *tattvas* is like a fragment of a big mirror that reflects the light on its own and yet is but a part of the whole. The *guru tattva* is that aspect of the Universe, that fragment of the big mirror, that window that truly enables us to have a vision of our Real Self. It is the highest and most pure of the windows through which we can realize *aham brahmasmi*, “I am that highest divinity itself.”

*S = It is generally said that when the student is ready the teacher will appear. Is this also true in the guru-chela relationship? Is the guru that attracts the chela or the chela that “finds” the guru?*

A = It does seem to work both ways! The famous statement says, “The *guru* will appear when the student is ready.” This

seems to put the onus on the student to search, research and prepare themselves for the *guru tattva* to manifest in whatever form that will enable them to maximize their inherent divinity. This is well accepted and quite true in general for one does need to be prepared for the “moment” to “happen” rather than be served on a platter without making any self effort. However I feel there is quite a bit of truth in stating that the *guru* also determines which student will make an attempt to reach them.

This has an interesting parallel in genetic theories about the mechanisms determining the gender of the fetus. At conception, gender is determined by the sex chromosomes (XX or XY) and their characteristics. It is usually accepted that the male partner (or rather the male's sperm) dictates whether the fetus conceived will be boy or girl. This is because the unfertilized female ovum carries only an X chromosome while the sperm may carry either an X or a Y chromosome. If the sperm carrying an X chromosome from the male fertilizes the ovum a girl will be conceived and if the sperm carrying a Y chromosome fertilizes the ovum, a boy will be conceived. This was also conceptualized by Aristotle a long time ago when he claimed that the male principle was the driver behind sex determination. Modern genetics has however now come to a conclusion that no “one” single factor is responsible for determining sex. They talk about a number of pro-male, anti-male and pro-female genes being responsible, though the largest factor is still whether the male's gamete carries an

X or Y chromosome. In fact, recent findings indicate that maternal influences<sup>27</sup> may impact which sperm is more likely to achieve conception and that there may be mechanisms by which the mother selectively encourages or discourages sperm with particular characteristics. This to me is similar to the concept that the *guru* determines which student will make an attempt to come to them, and also which one will ultimately come too. I would say in conclusion that, just as the mother “influences” which sperm will impregnate her, the *guru tattva* attracts to its presence those sincere souls that require its care and guidance for their best possible chances of success of their evolutionary process. The play of spiritual genetics is not too different from that of physical genetics in many regards!

*S = What are the treasures that can emerge out of the guru-chela relationship in your own experience?*

*A = The guru-chela relationship is the most special relationship one can have as a conscious human being. The true chela perceives the Divine through the eyes of the real guru. The guru enables the potential divinity in the chela to manifest in totality and will not rest till the chela has attained kaivalya, even if it is at the cost of losing them. This enables the chela to make evolutionary leaps in spiritual growth and offers a contentment of spirit, provided through no other relationship.*

<sup>27</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maternal\\_influence\\_on\\_sex\\_determination](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maternal_influence_on_sex_determination)

This relationship is truly beyond words for it is a conglomeration of all relationships in one. Every relationship you can think of: parent-child, child-parent, teacher-student, student-teacher, husband-wife, friend-friend, mentor-mentored and guide-guided. It has the essence of each and every relationship that you can conjure up in your mind and heart, even the enemy-enemy one! It is a win-win relationship for not only does the *chela* benefit, but so does the *guru*. True *gurus* want their *chelas* to grow beyond them, and in doing so, they grow too.

*S = Is this the deep meaning of the verse in the Guru Stotra, which states: "[Guru] You are my mother, my father, my relative and my friend. You are my wisdom, my wealth. You are everything."*<sup>28</sup>?

*A =* Very true, and very well correlated indeed. The *guru* is indeed everything. I like the other quote by Swami Satchidananda who said, "The teaching is the real teacher. If you follow the teaching, you will always have the teacher with you."

*S = If you only had one teaching to offer to your students which would it be?*

*A =* Every moment in life is an occasion, an opportunity to learn, evolve and grow spiritually. Don't waste any moment!

Use every chance given by the Universe to grow and evolve in consciousness, for *kaivalya* beckons you!

<sup>28</sup> *Aum. Twam eva mata, cha pita twam eva/Twam eva bandhus cha, sakha twam eva/Twam eva vidhy, dravinam twam eva/Twam eva sarvam, mama deva deva. Aum*

V

**The Artist as a  
Humane Being**

## The Artist as a Humane Being

*S = In the contemporary “yoga scene” yoga is often equated with asana and asana with physical exercises that can improve health and general well-being. Often those who join a yoga class have one or many diseases; physical, emotional, or mental. Yet, in the traditional context of a gurukula only the “fit” ones were accepted, the adhikarin, those in “tune” with the higher realms, ready to receive the teachings. The yoga path is, ultimately, for the cheerful, the content, and the courageous. This disparity between traditional and contemporary forms of teaching can also be applied to the realm of music.*

*For about ten years, between the age of 16 and 26, I performed professionally in the rock, blues and jazz scenes in Europe and the United States. This required training, commitment, practice, study, and social networking skills. Rock is a very difficult style to interpret. Many believe that one has to merely scream but this is far from the truth. Yet, at one point, I hit a wall. Music revealed itself as a tool for conscious evolution and it demanded that I made certain choices in life-style, attitudes, choice of lyrics, choice of company, choice of sites and times of concerts, and so on. This search for a deeper meaning contained*



*in the medium of sound brought me to the study of yoga in India. Studying*

*yoga and Carnatic music as an adult in the traditional context of a gurukula (the home of the guru) at Ananda Ashram and in a modern setting at Yoganjali Natyalayam, I had to face some of these hang-ups of my musical education. First of all, I had to learn how to sit on the floor. No stools, no chairs, no standing, no roaming and jumping around the stage. Just sitting still, at-ease, calmly. This is what I was also learning in my daily hatha yoga class with Ammaji: sit up, be quiet, listen! And learn to be soft, gentle, active in stillness and quiet in action. All the teachings from the Yoga Sutra of Maharishi Patañjali<sup>29</sup> to the Srimad Bhagavad Gita fell into place. Maharishi Patañjali says: sthiram sukham asanam, asana is being still and at ease. I could barely sit for half an hour during my music lessons. I soon realized that, on a technical level, a Carnatic vocal class and performance requires great strength and not just will power. It contains many of the steps of ashtanga yoga:*

<sup>29</sup> Maharishi Patañjali is one of the foremost of Indian sages whose life is interspersed with legendary stories of great mastery. He is the codifier of the *Yoga Darshan*, the *yogic* perspective of living as manifest in his *Yoga Sutra*, a series of aphorisms on *yoga* that give us the teachings of *ashtanga* and *kriya yoga* as a means to achieve *kaivalya*.

*the body has to be healthy to sit (asana), the breath has to be regulated and rhythmic (pranayama), and the mind has to be held in one place, concentrated (dharana). Then, on the level of the contents of the music, the way the notes are arranged in a ragam and*

*the rhythm is carefully selected (talam), the way the lyrics are received as a form of inspiration and offered to the Divinity as a form of prasadam, all this and more can be carefully connected to the yama and niyama, the moral and ethical universal laws.*

*The artist has a choice to commit (or not) to art as a spiritual form and therefore use the practice as a sadhana to become a truly humane being. Art should not be marketed as “spiritual” when the artists are living an unethical and immoral life. The artist who is on a spiritual path should be clean and strong and not fall into “ego dreams.”*

*Can an artist “channel” the devotion and love expressed in Carnatic kirtis and in bhajans without making an effort in awareness? Can a yoga teacher teach without living a life according to the teachings? Can you express the Divine if you are not striving to become the Divine?*

A = One parallel that is there is that in both music and yoga we undergo a process of “culturing” ourselves which has to be at the level of the body, the emotions, the mind, the spirit. In this process we go from being a rough potential diamond to the final manifest polished gem. The process is one of intense purification that is the “chipping away” of all that is not essential. Both the yoga and music paths are on-going, there is not an end-point as such, though we talk of *samadhi* or

*kaivalya*, *moksha* or *nirvana*. It is a continuous process, day-by-day, hour-by-hour, “now-by-now,” to the minutest unit of time, of becoming “better,” if I may use this adjective. In every *kshana*, as Maharishi Patañjali calls these small units of time, there is a growth compared to the previous one. This may be compared to yesterday, to last month or year or even lifetime. This is a commonality between *yoga* and music.

Maharishi Patañjali's concept of *kayasampat*,<sup>30</sup> perfection of body, includes the qualities of *rupa*, *lavanya*, *bala*, *vajra*, *samhananatvani*. *Rupa*, the form, should be beautiful. Artists should be beautiful. The model of the sad, unclean, and unpleasant super-star must be outgrown. The same applies in the world of *yoga* where sometimes you see *yogi* or *sannyasi* that are just “a bag of bones.” Yet, according to the *Maharishi*, perfection of the body implies beauty and *lavanya*, grace. Beauty and grace here are not referred to what can result from cosmetic-surgery or pretense. It is the development of inner-

beauty manifesting through the external. When the heart is pure, beauty and grace will manifest. This type of beauty and grace may not match the standards of the glossy fashion magazines. When I think of Lakshman Sir,<sup>31</sup> when I

<sup>30</sup> *Yoga Sutra*, III:47

<sup>31</sup> Natya Kalanidhi, Natya Kala Ratna Shironmani Padmashri Kalaimamani Guru Sri Adyar K. Lakshman (1933 - ) is the *Bharatanatyam* dance Param *guru* of Yoganjali Natyalayam, having been the *guru* to Kalaimamani Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani as well as Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani.

think of Sankaranarayanan Sir,<sup>32</sup> there is a beauty and grace in them, which has come through the music and dance. If you break down the anatomy, you may say that they are too short or too tall, have a big nose or small eyes, and so on. Yet, they embody these qualities of true beauty.

They also embody *bala*, strength. This strength comes from the power of their conviction, the certainty that they are on the right path, that what they are doing is a bigger process. It also comes from the courage of taking people with you on this path, from being able to apologize and admit when we are wrong. This is the *bala* that both music and *yoga* require. It is not about having good looks, great muscles, or a perfect vocal technique. It is the strength of conviction, which is required in both. The next quality that the *Maharishi* mentions as part of perfection is *vajra samhananatvani*, an adamant hardness, not of the gross level but of the subtle level, as in the quality of compactness of a diamond nature. The diamond can cut anything but nothing can cut a diamond. The spiritual journey has innumerable trials and tribulations and this compactness is required to succeed, the capacity to withstand troubles and overcome obstacles. This quality can only come when you are established in yourself. If you are not, any disturbance can come, and will make you fall apart.

<sup>32</sup> Tiruvalangadu Vembu Iyer Sankaranarayanan (1945 - ), is an eminent Carnatic singer born in Tamil Nadu. He started to learn music from his uncle and *guru* Sangeetha Kalanidhi Madurai Mani Iyer. He has received many awards among which the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India and the Sangeetha Kalanidhi by the Madras Music Academy stand out as testimony to his musical genius.

*S = These traditional arts were born in the temples, out of ritual gestures and ritual chanting. Many of the yoga asana were also developed in the context of worship. Pandits and devotees were traditionally able to sit and chant for many hours during homa and puja so these qualities were all necessary and became an inherent part of the art itself and of yoga as well.*

A = Yes. In the old days, Carnatic music singers would start singing at night and go on until sunrise. Nowadays, people have become very weak and can barely tolerate to perform the normal functions. There was an article in the paper not too long ago about an organizer who wanted to put together long performances and could barely find artists who had the skills, let alone the interest, of committing to such events. Who can sing for four hours and, on top of that, maintain the audience's attention for such a long time?

*S= Is this where the concept of the purification of the senses, that we have addressed, comes in? The capacity to be pure enough to concentrate and listen for a long time?*

A= Absolutely. Some of our great singers used to sing for six to eight hours non-stop! The audience would come and go, and the accompaniment would change here and there. Same with the dancers. They would just dance in the temples for very long stretches of time. Even in the *yoga* teachings, some of the *swami* could teach for a very long time. Swamiji's *guru*,

Yogamaharishi Swami Kanananda Brighu,<sup>33</sup> used to have the *vak siddhi*, the psychic power to be able to talk non-stop. He used to go to the fairs that were conducted in villages. There would be a seat for him on a simple stage and he would be talking for days! People would come and go and he would just be there. This is the manifestation of *kayasampat*.

The capacity to sing, dance or hold *asana* for a long time is not

<sup>33</sup> Yogamaharishi Swami Kanananda Brighu was the *yoga guru* of Swami Gitananda Giri. He codified the teachings of *mantra*, *yantra* and *tantra* that are today part and parcel of the *Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga* tradition taught at ICYER. He was famous for his *vak siddhi* and was able to speak for days on end, continuously, without tiring, without sleeping, without eating. His second *siddhi* was that he was, like Arjuna, a master of sleep. He never slept, though he would rest, or sit with eyes closed in *padma asana* for hours. He is mentioned in Swami Yogananda's book, *Autobiography of a Yogi* as Ram Gopal Muzumdar, the sleepless saint. He left his mortal coil on the 26th of October, 1967, and his *jayanthi* is celebrated every year on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February with a special *homa* ceremony after a whole night of nonstop *AUM* chanting.

<sup>34</sup> *Yoga Sutra*, I:20.

a goal in itself. There are far too many people who can talk for hours and they are such a bore! It is about being able to keep us "alive," the capacity to keep a dynamic movement in the art or *sadhana* so that it is not dead. A dead body can lie down for hours, so what is the difference? In order to achieve this state, *abhyasa* (full-hearted practice) is required. Maharishi Patañjali lists certain qualities of character for the spiritual aspirant that are quite relevant because they apply to the *yoga sadhaka* as well as the artist and, in fact, to the human being in general:<sup>34</sup> *shraddha* a wisdom-based faith; *veerya*, the courage and ability to push through

obstacles; *smriti*, memory and the ability to learn from our experiences; and *samadhiprajna*, the higher consciousness. Only when these qualities are there, *yoga* can occur, music can occur. You cannot simply jump on stage and say: “Ok, now I am going to sing.” Music has to come through you. In the same way, you cannot “do” *yoga*. *Yoga has to flow through you*. For this to happen, the development of the above qualities are the pre-requisite. Along with them, a very deep notion must be contemplated: we are but a tool in the hands of the Divine. This must to be understood in a positive sense and not as being “puppets on a string” that are being played with. We are a tool, we have a conscious will: we have the *iccha shakti*, will-power, the *kriya shakti*, the power of action, and the *jnana shakti*, the power of wisdom. At the same time, what we do should resonate at the frequency of the Divine. To know this theoretically is one thing, but the moment you start to feel this, to realize it, everything you do in your *yoga sadhana* will let the Divine flow through you; everything you will do in your music *sadhana* will let the Divine flow through you. When you sing, it is the Divine singing through you. If you are able to culture and refine yourself to the point where the Divine can flow through you without distortions, divine music will occur. This is why, irrespective of the art form – and *yoga* is an art form – an artist must be a good human being because, otherwise, this flow cannot occur. People may be virtuosos but the soul is lacking. That spirit can only come through and manifest if the person is a good human being. When I think of Lakshman Sir or Sankaranarayanan Sir, I can say that the Divine comes through them because they are such good human beings.

*S = In the history of music there were and are artists able to let the Divine flow through them and yet, when one looks at their personal lives, they may not be defined as “good human beings” according to yogic moral and ethical standards. How do you explain this in light of what we have discussed so far?*

*A= The only way I could explain that is that, somehow, when these people came to their music, when they entered sound, they were able to access a different plane of existence. Maybe it is a *siddhi*, something they were born with. Despite all the apparent obstacles, there was such a force in them, that they could tune their soul to the Divine Spirit. Swamiji used to repeat this concept often: for art to flow, artists must be pure, and for artists to be pure, a good human life is a pre-requisite.*

*S= Yet, for many, political or social injustice could cause obstacles to that purity, despite their best intentions.*

*A= Yes. This is why we must remember that there are different styles and types of music and that what applies to one may not apply to another. It is important to remember what the aim of that music is. When we talk about Carnatic music we focus on an art that is primarily *bhakti* [devotion] based. I don't know how so-called artists could live an unhealthy life-style and perform this type of music.*

*S= Yet you mentioned in your classes some examples of a great veena player and other musicians who got caught up in alcoholism or drugs and yet were able to let the Divine flow through their music...*



A= Yes, this is where that amazing music can be made but still something does not fully come through. You can hear it in the music, or see it in the dance. The difference is perceptible.

<sup>35</sup> Madurai Shanmukhavadiyu Subbulakshmi (1916-2004) was an outstanding Carnatic vocalist. Born in Madurai, she gave performances since a very early age – her first recoding was released when she was ten years old – in many Indian languages. She was also active in the film industry in the earlier part of her life. She traveled all over the world and was the first musician to be awarded the Bharat Ratna, the highest Indian civilian honor and many other honors. She sang at the UN in 1966 and donated many of the royalties on her best-sold records to charity organizations.

<sup>36</sup> Purandara Dasa (1484-1564) was born in Karnataka state and wrote his compositions mainly in Kannada language and some in Sanskrit. Considered the “father of Carnatic music”, he systematized the method of teaching which is followed to the present day. He introduced the *ragam mayamalavagowla* as the basic scale for music instruction and fashioned series of graded lessons such as *swaravalis*, *janta swaras*, *alankaras*, *lakshana geetas*, *prabandhas*, *ugabhogas*, *dhattu varase*, *geeta*, *sooladis* and *kritis*.

The connection with the Infinite cannot happen unless the person is making a constant attempt to move from the animal state to the human state to even a *humane* state.

For example, when we talk about Bharat Ratna Smt. M.S. Subbulakshmi<sup>35</sup> we talk of her as virtually Divine. She was truly an elevated person! And, please, this is not adulation. There is something in her and her singing that is even beyond humane. She has touched Divinity. If you look at her life, you can see a divine reflection in it, too.

Purandara Dasa<sup>36</sup> is praised as the *pitamaha*, the grand-old patriarch of Carnatic music. There is so much *bhakti* in his compositions.

Tyagaraja<sup>37</sup> is considered a saint. These people did touch Divinity and yet they were so human. There is a story about Tyagaraja that is emblematic. His brother became upset with him because he “just” sang and composed and was not able to keep some commitment with the family, such as earning money and so on. So the brother thought: “See all our problems are because of Rama!” and taking Tyagaraja’s idol of Lord Rama he threw it into the Kaveri, the grand river nearby. Tyagaraja did not know about this but just noticed that the idol was missing and was in despair. Such a great soul, so broken by the disappearance of an object. For him, the idol was a manifestation of Rama himself and he could not tolerate its absence. He created many compositions in which he cried to Lord Rama, “*Where are you? I cannot find you.*” Then, one day, after a dream of Lord Rama, he rushed to the bank of the river and found his loving idol. The composition that resulted from this experience, *Kanugontini*,<sup>38</sup> contains the highest blissful state that can be expressed.

Music has to elevate our consciousness. If you want the elevation, the vehicle – the

<sup>37</sup> Tyagaraja, (1767 - 1847), “singer-saint”, composer of Carnatic music. Born in Tiruvarur, on the Kaveri river, a place whose musical associations go back to the time of Saint Sundaramurti Nayanar and where the three of the “Music Trinity” of Carnatic music, Tyagaraja himself, Syama Sastri, and Muttuswami Dikshitar, were all born. He composed thousands of devotional compositions, most of them in praise of Lord Rama. His compositions remain very popular even today. His musical compositions were written in Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Sanskrit (see Ramanujachari, 1958).

<sup>38</sup> The text and translation of the song are in the Appendix V.

performer – has to be a good human being. Maybe at the level of entertainment, the artist does not need to be a good person. In fact, it seems, it is more pleasant and profitable that he is not so that much gossip of the media can go around. Yet, if music is used to elevate our spirit, to make us change and evolve, there is no other option.

*S= Swamiji used to call the yoga of Maharishi Patañjali a “no-option yoga”. So here we are talking about “no-option music,” in the sense that we must make our best effort in sadhana and practice to elevate ourselves, without indulging or justifying our flaws, nor exalting our talents.*

A= For such a jump of consciousness, the ego has to come out of the way and along with it, all the *shat ripus*.<sup>39</sup> If I am on stage and all I can think about is how to put the level of my microphone up so that the violinist cannot be heard or if I play the *mridungam*, I go into very complex rhythmic patterns to confuse the singer, so that I can “show off,” what is the point?

<sup>39</sup> The “six enemies” of the spirit: *kama* (passion), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (infatuation), *mada* (pride), and *matsarya* (jealousy, malice, envy).

<sup>40</sup> Palghat T.S. Mani Iyer (1912-1981), born in Kerala, was one of the leading *mridungam* artistes (percussionists) in Carnatic music, the first to be awarded the Sangeetha Kalanidhi and Padma Bhushan awards.

What is going to flow? Nothing. You find people in concerts who can only care about themselves. I know many people who are so technically great, but who have no qualities of character. On the other hand, I can quote the example of one of the greatest *mridungam* players, Palghat Mani Iyer,<sup>40</sup> who,

even after the advent of the amplification, refused to play with a microphone for many years. The other musicians would be amplified but not him. Imagine the strength, the compactness, and the faith that such a man must have to withstand a full-length concert without that support. Of course, originally, all musicians – here in India as well as in the West – played without microphones, but to be the only one without it requires a great conviction. He sat there to support the singers and not to overpower them. Contrast that with those musicians who, as soon as they sit on stage, the first thing they say is: “Put my mic up!” Even before they have tried it out. This is just an ego show.

If you are not able to feel for your fellow musicians who are on stage with you, who are your team, how are you going to feel for anyone else? If you do not have empathy, then how can you transmit that to the audience? If you are not intending to transmit good qualities and energies, then what is the point of your art? Sankaranayanan Sir used to say that the key to a successful performance is to know “the pulse of the listeners,” to feel them and according to your perception, modify the outcome of your performance.

*S= Is the audience a “whole”? A unity that can be experienced in all its variations?*

*A=* You could say that, yes. You start to resonate together and then you know what is required. It is not about “playing to the gallery.” It is about detecting a rhythm, playing to it, find a

common pulse, and carry the audience with you because they want to come with you. If you are sitting there to mechanically perform your ten songs and you can't find that connection, nothing happens. On the other hand, if you can be open enough to tune into others, you can attain inner peace. Contentment is there, *santosham*. It is only when you are at peace with yourself that you can be contented and, of course, only when you are contented you can be at peace with yourself.

*S= This brings us back to where we started: shtira sukham asanam. A singer in his "artistic asana" should be at ease and steady in himself. What happens when a foreigner begins the study of Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam especially as an adult? Despite the mistakes in pronunciation or the faults in the right intonation of a ragam, if their effort is the best they can make, could their performance be considered "whole"? Being born here, in a gurukula, trained in these arts and yoga since conception, what is your experience as a teacher of an international student body in this regard?*

*A= What is most important is perfection of effort. This the point that I try to get through to participants in my yoga therapy practice: it is not the perfection in asana that will give you the health benefits but the perfection of the effort you put in doing the asana or in the pranayama. When the best possible effort is there, the person can transcend the technical imperfections in the eyes of the Divine. In the eyes of certain people, however,*

the performers could be wrong in the *ragam* or *talam*. There are two ways to raise one's self: the first one is to go higher and higher; the second one is to push everyone else down. Many people cannot raise themselves because they are incapable of making the effort. The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* says, "raise the self by the self." Many people cannot do that, so they push everyone else down to become the tallest ones. As long as the focus is towards the higher, I think the Divine will forgive us for our mistakes. The Divine is large-hearted. The more people evolve, the more people can forgive and accept. Smaller minds can only see the small mistakes as the big thing. There is a saying: to err is human and to forgive is Divine. I would add to that: to forget is to be stupid! We must remember our experiences so that we can grow.

*S= What do you mean when you talk about a humane being?*

*A=* In a humane being, a sense of empathy has to be present. There has to be an understanding of the fact that we have limitations and so do other people. When we make a mistake we hope others will forgive us, but when others make a mistake we want to point them out and often remember it for years! To be able to point out our mistakes, and forgive others is to be a humane being. We do not need to condone, but to understand. We should develop the ability to see life in the bigger picture. We are caught in a mighty wheel, we should not forget this. Through our limitations, the unlimited Divine can flow. We

should develop the ability to put to words what we think, and do what we say, filling the gap between our thoughts, words and deeds. This is the “ability to do our best and leave the rest,” the ability to understand that life is process, and not an end. That’s what a humane being is. It is not about being tall, short, Italian or Indian. We must all live our *dharma*.

People often ask me the question of what is my impression of *yoga* in the West. There are sincere *sadhaka* out there who are really trying to grow and live a good life. It is not about nationality. True seekers are a small minority but they are out there doing the work. There are people who are able to develop the qualities of *bala* and *vajra* and the others. It is a matter of being secure within the self. You know something

<sup>41</sup> A play on concepts: *yogah chittavritti nirodhah* is the definition that Maharishi Patañjali gives of *yoga* in the *Yoga Sutra*. As commented by Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri, this *sutra* can be translated as “*yoga* is the cessation of the whirlpools of the mind.”

When discussing the goal of music and tracing parallels between *yoga* and music *sadhana*, Dr. Ananda came up with the definition that the goal of making sound can be the cessation of sound itself, silence. Therefore, *yogah nada* (sound) *vritti nirodha*, “*yoga* is the cessation of all sonic vibration.”

and nothing can shake you. There is no sense of insecurity inside. Some people come into *yoga*, some come into music but many have never heard the word *yoga* nor they know music. When one chooses music as a *sadhana*, *nada yoga*, when one is attempting for the *chittavrittinirodha* of *yoga* or the *nadavrittinirodha* of music,<sup>41</sup> one has to make an effort to be a good human being. There is no other choice.

S= How do we know we are on the right path?

A= We must develop humility.

S= What is humility?

A= It is an ability for us to be able to see the bigger picture. If you cannot see the bigger picture, you cannot be humble. If we are only living in our own world, we cannot be humble. If you start by realizing that in your family you are one among, let's say, a dozen people; in your community one among a hundred; in your town one among a few thousands and so on until you remember you are one of the seven billion people alive on Earth today, and that Earth is so small in our galaxy and so on, well, you can't miss the fact that we are quite a small speck. You realize that you are quite small when compared to the whole. The same applies when you realize that you as the producer of the music are so negligible in comparison to all sounds. They call this greatness of sounds *sangeeta sagara*, the *Ocean of Music*. You are just a drop in this ocean of music. Once you have that perspective, humility is but natural. In Tamil we have a saying: *kattradu kaimanalavu, kalladadu ulagalavu*, meaning "what we have learned is the amount of sand that is in our fist, what we do not know is the entire earth." There is so much arrogance today in all fields of knowledge. We are so minuscule against the whole. The common mind-field is the mentality of the "frog in the well:" a well is basically a hole and in that small space the frog feels like a king. It is so



important for people to meet others, go to performances, listen to recordings. It suddenly hits you: you are one among many!

When we are face to face with artists who have reached a stage of near-perfection, the ego may push you to give up your practice. One may ask one's self: *Why should I even try to learn? I am never going to learn to get to such a stage!* This is our ego talking. The true inner self, however, can recognize greatness and bow to it. This is humility and when this quality of character is there, we can grow. If the sense of humility is not there, growth is stopped. When people are honestly trying to grow, growth itself will make them stand out.

Humility and simplicity go together. When I think of Lakshman Sir, for example, I can see a great person with his head firmly planted on his shoulders. A very simple person yet so rich inwardly: simple living and high thinking. There is a sense of contentment in him, and yet the drive for perfection is there. This is a very essential quality.

*S= Today, on the other hand, simplicity is not sought after. There are more and more gadgets in the world of yoga for example, and more and more qualifications and certifications are required to even teach yoga or music. Quality seems to be equated with complexity rather than with simplicity.*

A= The moment yoga or music, those more “right-brain” activities, are placed in the context of an official academic “left-

brain” structure, we start to hit obstacles. We forget what art is about, what *yoga* is about. A vast chasm occurs between music and what people are doing now in schools. As *yoga* moves into the academic framework, for example, there are going to be more and more people with Ph.D. in *yoga*, but are they truly qualified to teach by example? In consequence, *yoga* is going to mutate and change form.

S= *We already see the trend of limiting yoga to asana alone...*

A= Yes, it is already happening in the West to some extent. I say often that “*yoga therapy*” is basically just another name for physiotherapy with *yoga* techniques.

S= *Why are we losing the essence?*

A= People are not able to look at themselves, they are not able to observe themselves in a process of *swadhyaya*, they are not able to be objective and dispassionate, so there is no *vairagya*. Automatically humility will not be there. If these qualities are not there, the arrogant and ignorant ego will grow more and more. To be able survive in the world as a good human being is a great challenge today. The spiritual muscles have to be trained and strengthened. There has to be a strong positive self-esteem, *aishwarya*, also called *swabhiman*. It is good to find human beings who set an example by living according to these qualities. I am thinking, for example, of an Indian

neurosurgeon, Dr. Balasubramanian Ramamurthi, hailed as the “father of neurosurgery in India.” He visited Swamiji and Ammaji a few times here as we knew him well. He wrote an autobiography called *Uphill All the Way*.<sup>42</sup> You would think he is a great man and that it would have been easy for him, but it was not so. In the book he writes about all the trials and tribulations he faced in setting up new wards in the hospitals, how people used to pass comments, etc. It is inspiring to realize that even such people had to face trouble.

When we talk about humility and simplicity today, most people would frame them as the qualities of a “loser” so it is heartening to find them among people who are at the top of their professions. We must know that we can succeed without having to trample upon others.

*S= The path is long and arduous and requires a lot of patience.*

A= Patience and humility definitely go together. Both of them are slow waves, while arrogance and greed are very fast and have many ups and downs. We need to find stability. The golden thread running among all the good qualities of character that we have mentioned is a steadiness, a closeness to the center, a point of balance.

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<sup>42</sup> Balasubramanian Ramamurthi, *Uphill All the Way: An Autobiography* (Chennai, India: Achanta Lakshmipathi Neurosurgical Centre, 2000).

Humility requires such a great inner strength. No strength is ego and great strength is humility. There was a series of commercials put out by a company in which you would see the image of a doctor and the heading would be “The Doctor Who Killed the Singer” or a picture of an engineer with the heading “The Engineer Who Killed the Artist” and so on. It was about how, due to parental expectation or other factors, the person “killed” who they could have been if they had manifested their full potential.

*S= When you were mentioning the capacity to see the bigger picture, and how that is a prerequisite to humility, I was reminded of the teachings of Shri Krishna to Arjuna in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita. The Gita is a jewel in the Mahabharata and in the Gita, the vision of the viswarupa of Krishna is its crest jewel. Arjuna is dejected and desperate. Lord Krishna is giving him many angles to re-frame his perceptions and then, finally, shows him all that is. Arjuna can barely tolerate the vision (the very deep meaning of a “larger picture”) and requests Krishna to come back to him as his friend. This is a teaching on humility, isn’t it?*

*A= Yes. Lord Krishna is forced to give Arjuna this vision. Before then, the Lord was only perceived as a friend and not fully understood. Suddenly Arjuna realizes how minuscule he is compared to the “big picture.” Before then, he was so caught up in the details. Now he can finally see the whole. This is*

where Krishna is so different from Rama. He can truly manifest as the Highest and give teachings as such. Suddenly you realize that each note you are intoning is already there, every song you are singing is already there. This could also drive you to despair. One has to be very careful with these teachings.

*S= Even Arjuna could barely tolerate it and he was such a valiant and strong warrior!*

A= Yes. Swamiji used to say that a breakdown is often a great opportunity for a breakthrough. This is what happens to Arjuna in the *Gita*. He finally makes a breakthrough. Some people, however, cannot make it through and succumb to truth. I think of Mahakavi Subramanya Bharathi,<sup>43</sup> our great Tamilian poet and composer. He went into despair so many times. He was on a strong spiritual quest, heightened by his association with Sri Aurobindo, the results of which are evident in his poems. He was so disappointed and disillusioned with the society he saw around him. He wrote a beautiful song, a challenge to the Divine. I often sing it in my concerts:

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<sup>43</sup> A great poet and independence fighter, Subramanya Bharathi (1882-1921) commonly known as Bharathiyar was fluent in various languages but was a fervent lover and supporter of his native Tamil language and literature, especially the old scriptures and texts. He composed many poems as well as Carnatic music devotional compositions.

*Do you really think I am going to wither away like all  
these jokers who roam around?  
Trying to find food to eat and speaking small talk?  
Suffering in their mind and heart, and  
doing things to hurt others?  
greying and aging until they are merely prey for death!  
Do you think I am like one of them?*

That is a really ignited soul. Yet, he was not able to look at the bigger picture and became heart-broken. If we give in to despair we cannot survive. It is very difficult to survive as a good person in this world.

*S= The Srimad Bhagavad Gita contains an important teaching about dharma. One has to perform one's dharma to the best potential and yet release all the fruits to the Divine. If one's dharma is to communicate through music, and yet the music scene is so commercial today, what can one do? I am thinking mostly of younger kids who may want to take music as a profession and yet are faced with an environment that is often adharmic. There is such a great responsibility in the search for one's dharma. The artist must ask one's self: How important is this art for me? What is its function? Am I able to sustain its practice? How strong am I? How committed am I? This is where the study of music can become a sadhana.*

*In the many years of studying and teaching music I met many people who have "always wanted" to sing but have never taken up the study either due to a lack of self-esteem or to the fear of exploring their higher potential. I also met many people who*

*did sing or dance “when they were young” and then stopped due to social circumstances. They are fine, apparently, but inside they are aching so much it is making them sick. People should learn that we are born with certain gifts and that it is our responsibility to nourish them. It is a form of swadharma, personal dharma.*

*The arts and now yoga have become like any other commodity: you have it, it's fine; you don't have it, it's fine. The most important sense of sacredness is being lost. Even worst, the arts are downgraded to mere entertainment. The whole process of culturing that comes from the practice of art is, therefore, lost. To supplement it, people spend more and more money eating, buying stuff they never use, change their bodies with plastic surgery and so on. If they could only see that they are starving themselves spiritually, in the true sense, perhaps there would be less dis-ease around us. The concept of humility also has been deformed. As you said, people see it as the quality of a loser. Or worst, they use a false sense of humility to strengthen their fears: “I cannot sing anyway, why should I try?” “What is the point of spending so much energy in studying these dance steps? I will never become famous!” “If I join that yoga class people will make fun of me.” “Who am I to think I can be beautiful, strong, graceful?” What looks like an apparent humility is, in fact, egotism in disguise!*

*This reminds me of a statement I heard before : we are not afraid of our failure; we are afraid of our greatest success. Educators have, therefore a great responsibility today. We need to teach by example how to fully express our highest potential.*

# Appendix I

## Nada Yoga Techniques<sup>44</sup>

### I. NASARGA MUKHA BHASTRIKA:

*Nasarga mukha bhastrika* is a forceful expulsion of the breath through the mouth that can accompany different movements to relieve our pent-up stress. Take up a comfortable standing position and then start to shake your hands as vigorously as possible to help loosen up the accumulated tensions of your daily life. Visualize all the tensions that have accumulated in your wrist and elbow joints getting a good ‘shake up’ by this action. When you have got the tensions loosened up, take in a deep breath through your nose and clench your fist as if catching hold of all your tensions and stress. Now with a powerful blast through your mouth “whoosh” away all your accumulated

<sup>44</sup> Extract from a paper presented by Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani at the *Golden Jubilee National Seminar cum Workshop on Role of Yoga in Respiratory Tract Disorders with Special Reference to Bronchial Asthma* organized by the *Advanced Centre for Yoga Research and Education (ACYER), Gujarat Ayurved University, Gujarat Ayurved University, Jamnagar, January 20-21, 2011*. Printed for the first time as “Nada Yoga Techniques for Prevention and Management of Breathing Disorders” in *Yoga Life* 2011. 42; (March): 3-6.

tensions and stress as forcibly as possible. Again shake your hands as fast as possible. Breathe in and catch hold of the tension in your fist. Throw it all away with a blast. Make sure that you are using your diaphragm muscle vigorously while blasting out the breath in this practice. Perform this practice three, six or nine times as necessary. After performing three to nine rounds of this practice,



relax in the standing position and enjoy the feeling of relief that sweeps through your arms as you relax with some deep breathing.

## **II. HAKARA KRIYA:**

This activating practice combines the use of movement with sound to give vent to pent-up emotional and mental stress by way of an effective release. It is also a good *yoga* warm up. Stand in the *samasthiti asana* with your arms by your side. Breathe in and at the same time jump with your legs apart while clapping your hands over your head. Breathe out and make the explosive sound “HA” while jumping back to the standing position with the feet together and hands by the side. Do this six to nine times in a vigorous manner. *Ha-kara* is the production of the “HA” sound which is related to the solar plexus. This plexus of nerves at the top of the abdomen is one of the centers where stress tends to accumulate. The strengthening of this area prevents the “butterflies in the stomach” feeling that occurs whenever we are stressed out. After completing the practice relax back in the *samasthiti asana* and perform deep and controlled breathing for a few minutes. Enjoy the rejuvenating feeling as the energetic circulation of fresh blood rushes through your entire body.

## **III. MALLA KRIYA:**

This activity is loosely based upon the warm ups done by Indian wrestlers to prepare them to face the battle. It involves the

use of the forceful *bhastrika* breathing in synchrony with movement from the standing to the squatting position. Stand in the *samasthiti asana* and clasp your elbows in front of your chest with the right hand on the left arm and the left hand on the right arm. Take a deep breath in and then blast the breath out with a “whoosh” and at the same time come down to the squatting *utkat asana*. Breathe in and at the same time come back up to the standing position. Blast out the breath and go into the *utkat asana*. Breathe in and come back up to the standing position. Blast out and go into the *utkat asana*. Perform at least nine rounds of this practice. At the end of the *malla kriya* relax in the *utkat asana*, the squatting posture that is valuable for the proper functioning of our abdominal and pelvic organs that make up our digestive and urinary systems. Your feet should be as flat to the ground as possible. Wind your arms tightly around your legs as if embracing yourself. Give yourself a good hug and feel the pressure that is generated in the abdominal region. All the organs are given a good massage and the whole digestive and urinary systems are invigorated. When ready release the posture and come into any sitting position.

Enjoy the renewed circulation of fresh blood into your abdomen and pelvis. *Malla kriya* is valuable for those suffering stress disorders such as diabetes mellitus, indigestion, irritable bowel syndrome, peptic ulceration and impotency.

#### IV. KUKKRIYA PRANAYAMA:

*Kukkriya pranayama*, the dog pant breath, is an excellent cleanser and tones up the diaphragm and the abdominal organs that are in close approximation to the diaphragm. Sit in *vajra asana* with the weight of your body firmly on both heels. Place your palms on the ground in front with your wrists touching your knees and the fingers pointing forward. Open your mouth wide and push your tongue out as far as possible. Breathe in and out at a rapid rate with your tongue hanging out of your mouth. After ten or fifteen rounds relax back into the *vajra asana* and feel the blood flow into your abdominal area. Repeat the whole practice three more times.

#### V. BHUJANGINI MUDRA:

To perform the “cobra gesture,” take up the *unmukha asana* which is a prone position with your entire body in a straight line. In this technique the emphasis is on the breathing pattern and the production of a mighty hissing sound through the clenched teeth. Slowly bring your arms forward and keep your palms on the ground alongside your shoulders. Take in a deep breath. While making a mighty hissing sound, flare back into the *bhujanga asana*. Slowly relax back onto the floor while breathing in and then again flare back with a mighty hiss. Repeat this *mudra* at least three to six times at each session. This technique helps release the pent up stress that accumulates in our system from our daily life and provides

great emotional and mental relief. It is an excellent stress-buster and is a must for all in this day and age. After completing the practice come back down to the face prone pose. Place your arms alongside your body and turn your head to the side. Relax for a few minutes and let the benefit of this *mudra* seep into each and every cell of your body.

## **VI. BHRAMARI PRANAYAMA:**

*Bhramari* is one of the *swara pranayamas* and helps tone up the nervous system thus producing a state of extreme calmness and bliss. Sit on your heels in the *vajra asana* with your spine erect. Perform *shanmuki mudra* with your thumbs closing the external auditory canals. The thumbs are placed over the ears. The first two fingers are placed over the closed eyelids while the ring fingers regulate the flow of air through the nostrils. The little fingers are placed over the closed lips. This *mudra* helps in uniting the energies of the nerves of the hands with the facial and trigeminal nerves of the face. Take in a slow and deep breath in for six counts. Then let out the breath very slowly while making a sound in the nasal passages like the high-pitched sound of a female bee. Perform nine rounds of this practice and then release your hands back to your thighs and enjoy a few minutes of deep contemplation while sitting in the *vajra asana*.

## VII. BRAHMA MUDRA:

*Brahma mudra* is a gesture of the head and neck and is an excellent practice for one and all. Take up any comfortable sitting position such as *vajra asana* with your spine as erect as possible. Rest your hands on your lap while performing the *yoga mudra*. Close your eyes and concentrate on this valuable practice that combines the use of physical movement synchronized with deep breathing and the usage of *nada* or vibrational sounds involving utterance of the *bija* sounds of “AAA,” “UUU,” “EEE” and “MMM.” *Brahma mudra* is an excellent practice to prevent as well as relieve disorders of the head, neck and upper shoulder areas. It is important to concentrate on the area to be relieved, repaired, or rejuvenated while sounding the *bija mantras*.

## VIII. PRANAVA PRANAYAMA AND DHYANA:

This practice is a one pointed concentration on the form and *nada* or sound of the sacred *pranava AUM*, known as the *mantra* of all *mantras*. This can be done from any of the sitting postures but make sure that your back is erect. It is best to do this after performing a few rounds of conscious deep breathing so that the mind is in a calm state. *Pranava dhyana* harmonizes the body, emotions and mind. It is an important part of the *Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga* tradition as taught by Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri. In this practice emphasis is first placed on making the sounds “AAA,” “UUU”

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and “MMM” separately and then in combination. This is followed by the performance of the practice mentally without the audible sound. A performance of three to nine rounds of the *pranava dhyana* when done daily helps to relax the Body-Emotion-Mind complex and provides complete healing through the production of healing vibrations at all levels of our existence. This is the cornerstone of *yogic* breath therapy and can produce health and wellbeing for all. When the concentrative aspect of the practice is taken to its peak, a state of meditation or *pranava dhyana* can ensue.

## Appendix II

# Shobhillu Saptaswara

This is a composition by the “singer-saint” Tyagaraja, in which he incites his higher mind (*manas*) to realize and worship the divine origin and nature of sound (*nada*) as it forms in the seven notes, the *sapta swara*. *Nadopasana*, or worship of music through music, is present in a few of Saint Tyagaraja’s compositions, such as *Sobhillu Saptaswara*, *Swara Raga Sudha*, *Nadopasana*, and *Nada Thanum Anisam*. In the *Pallavi*, Saint Tyagaraja describes how sound originates in the navel (*nabhi*) moving upwards through the heart, the throat, the tongue and the nose areas. In the *charanam* the four *Veda* – *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva Veda* – are quoted, with special consideration to the *Gayathri mantra*, considered very sacred.

*Ragam* : Jaganmohini

*Talam* : Rupakam

*Pallavi:*

shobhillu saptaswara

sundarula bhajimpave manasa (shobhillu...)

*Anupallavi:*

naabhi hru kanta rasana

naasadulu andu (shobhillu...)

*Charanam:*

dhara riksaamaadulalo  
vara gaayatri hridayamuna  
sura bhoosura maanasamuna  
shubha tyaagaraajuni eda (shobhillu...)

*[O mind! Worship the divine beauty  
of the effulgent seven notes,  
From the navel, heart, throat, tongue and nose,  
Arise these seven notes (worship...).  
In the Veda, Rk, Sama and the others,  
In the heart of the Gayathri mantra,  
In the minds of celestials and the Brahmanas,  
And in the person of this fortunate Tyagaraja, alike  
(worship...)]*



## Appendix III

# Shabdha Pratyahara

In Lesson 45 of *Yoga: Step-by-Step*, Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj introduces the practice of a controlled and evolutionary way to perceive inner and outer sound. This is the *shabdha pratyahara*, the control and restraint of sound (pp. 211-12):

*Sit in any of the recommended postures [comfortable yogic sitting positions] and listen inside of your own head for the subtle sound of blood coursing through the arteries and veins, the sound of blood pressure or the “lub-dub” of the heart’s pulsation. Other body sounds may be used as well. Listen intently for two or three minutes, then allow the thinking/hearing to go outside of the body and listen for sounds right around the body. Sometimes a vibrant static sound can be heard in the air immediately around the head. After listening for a few minutes, let the ears come under the control of the mind and listen to your immediate environment to sounds in the room or in the building or in the place where you sit. Now let the hearing go out into the area immediately around the site or building where you sit. Listen to every sound as it occurs. Now reach out with your hearing a hundred meters or so, perhaps up to a city block. Listen to any sounds occurring in that periphery. Stretch out the hearing for a mile, listening to all the sounds circumscribed by the limits of your Pratyahara Kriya.*

*Now, let the thinking/hearing go as far away from you as humanly possible. Concentrating on sending the hearing to far-off distances: listen intently. In this way you have allowed the sense of hearing to do exactly what it has been created to do... to hear. Now having exercised the hearing to its fullest, withdraw the sense of hearing through a reversal of the steps of the Kriya, performing the true purpose of the Pratyahara at each stage until after ten to fifteen minutes, you re-enter the body again. Then listen intently to the subtle sounds within. Raise the mind with the last vestige of this inner concentration on sound into Bhrumadhya or Tisra Til or the Shiva Netra. These centres are included within the concept of Ajna Chakra, the Centre of Inspiration in Tantra, and Kundalini Yoga.*

[...]

*Be wise enough at this point to recognize the dominant part that the sense of hearing plays in one's Inner Life. In the Inner Life, the senses are reversed. Inner Sight is a lower speed of vibration than Inner Sound. Mastering of physical hearing and Shabdha, Inner Hearing, is the key to Pratyahara.*

## Appendix IV

### The epitome of a true guru – Shri Adyar K. Lakshman<sup>45</sup>

How to catch a butterfly in the net of words? How to sketch a Master's spirit in a pen-portrait! One should be an expert poet! Such a delicate, subtle essence is not easily described. When I would express it, words suddenly fail me! Yet, I wish to make the attempt to offer my own humble tribute to the illustrious personality known to the world as Sri Adyar K. Lakshman Ji, or as he is known to his students, simply as “Sir”.

I came to “Sir” not as a child, but as a twenty-eight year old married woman with a two-year old child. Born in the USA in 1943, and domiciled in Pondicherry, India, I had longed to study the magic art of *Bharatanatyam* ever since my first witnessing of a performance in New Delhi in 1968, a year after my arrival in the country. The exquisite art was magic to me, and I longed to immerse myself in it. Good *karma* was indeed mine, as I found myself in 1974 carrying a plate of fruit and flowers, dressed in a dance *saree* costume, offering *pranams* in the first

class I enjoyed with Sir in his Gandhi Nagar residence. The thatch dance hall behind his house was a paradise to me, surrounded by trees and flowering bushes and bird songs igniting the air! This

<sup>45</sup> This tribute by Ammaji Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani to her Bharatanatyam *guru*, was published for the first time in the *Sruti Magazine, Chennai* ([www.sruti.com](http://www.sruti.com)) and reprinted in *Yoga Life*, Vol. 42, No. 8, August 2011, Pondicherry, India.

was a *gurukula* where the wonderful sounds of *salangai*, Carnatic music, *nattavangum*, *mridangam* and pounding feet entered the cells and bones, transforming by osmosis dead flesh to the lightness of melody. The ancient *Dravidian* art was passing from generation to generation as an invisible current from *guru* to *chela* here. Moments were magic. Sir was a hard taskmaster, and was a stickler for perfection in the Arduous. Fast and faster seemed to be the only speed he knew. When I walked back to my guest house (two kilometers distant) after a two-hour session, my feet had a life of their own and the soles desired to soak themselves in a tub of hot water for eternity. We learned! We learned the body geometry of *Bharatanatyam*. We learned the nuances of Indian *Samskrithi*, as sometimes, noticing our recalcitrant feet, Sir would kindly ask us to sit down and would then discuss the finer points of the historical – mythological tales we were trying to express through music and movement. Sir had deep insight into the spiritual nuances of Hindu symbolism and I found myself absorbing the ethos of the ancient *rishis* through his explanations. He had a tremendous knack for choreographing a complex idea into a few *mudras* and body stances. Brisk, quick, precise, to the point! Like an arrow shot straight to its mark! Never once did he make me feel I was too old (28 years when I began *Bharatanatyam*) nor too tall (at 5 feet 7, I towered over everyone, though nowadays most of my teenage students tower over me!). At the same time, it was difficult to pry even a single word of praise from him! I remember once when I made a mistake he said, “*I had such high hopes for you!*” I treasured that remark and considered it as a compliment,

probably the only one I ever got from him! That is the Indian *guru's* way, and I acknowledge the subtle psychological value of it. Hasn't this tradition been preserved for several millennia because of values like that? The student should know their worth by a glance from the master's eyes!

Sir is simplicity and humility personified. I have never heard him say a bad word about anyone. He is a true *rasika* and when he attends any Indian cultural performance he sits in total *dhyana* – a meditative state – becoming one with the performers. No idle chit-chat or distractions for him. He is a lover of Hindu *Samskrithi* as expressed through the cultural arts. He is a total *guru bhakta*, and remains to this day a devoted servant of his *guru* Smt Rukmini Devi Arundale. He speaks often of her and always as though he were speaking of a goddess. He loved to joke about the fact that if it had not been for Rukmini Devi, he might have become a famous cricketer. He was mad for cricket when he joined Kalakshetra at the young age of about ten. Apparently his teachers there made some complaints against him to Rukmini Devi and she called him to the office one day. “*Lakshman*”, she told him sternly. “*It's either cricket or Bharatanatyam - Carnatic Music! Choose one or the other*”. With reluctance he chose the artistic life. But even today during cricket season it is difficult to get any classes with him as he will be glued to the television set! He once said, “I obeyed my *guru* totally, except in one small matter.” Eagerly we asked, “What was that?” He said, “She

advised me not to marry till after the age of forty. But my parents pressured me to marry at thirty nine, and I obeyed their wishes over hers!”

Deeply spiritual, Sir also has great insight. Once when I was studying with him, someone close to me wrote a letter containing some unpleasant opinions about me to him. When he showed me the letter, I felt very sorry and asked him to give the letter to me. In front of me, he tore it up, saying, “*Something which is not real should not be allowed to exist*”. Well! Should I write a novel or even one hundred novels about this marvelous *guru*? He has also been a *guru* to my son Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani and his wife Smt. Devasena Bhavanani and I hope will be a *guru* to my grandchildren Dhivya Priya Bhavanani and Anandraj Bhavanani. The word *guru* means “*one who sheds light on ignorance*”. Truly – with his amazing capacity for affection, love and his heart brimming with good will towards all, Adyar K. Lakshman is the epitome of the proud *Bharata Samskrithi* tradition of *guru – hood*. May he live 100 years to shed light on the exquisite arts of *Bharatanatyam* and Carnatic Music for generation to come!

## Appendix V

# Kanugontini

Another composition by the “singer-saint” Tyagaraja, in which he rejoices in finding an idol of Rama that went missing. The composer’s brother, Jalpesan, had become infuriated with Tyagaraja and had thrown the idol into the river Kaveri without telling him. Tyagaraja was devastated and supplicated his Lord to reappear again. Lord Rama appeared in a dream and told him what had happened. He ran to the river and after finding the idol, burst into *Kanugontini*.

*Ragam* : Bilahari

*Talam* : Desadhi

*Pallavi:*

kanugontini shri ramuni nedu (kanulara na kamitambu  
dheera)

*Anupallavi:*

ina kulamandu impu gaanu buttina  
ilalona seeta naayakuni nedu (kanu)

*Charanam:*

bharata lakshmana shatrughnoolu koluva  
pavamaana sutudu paadamula battu  
dheerulaina sugreeva pramukhulu vinuta  
seya tyaagaraajanutuni nedu (kanu)

*[Today I beheld Lord Shree Rama, the consort of Sita,  
born nicely on the Earth, in the Solar dynasty.*

*Today I beheld Lord Shree Rama, praised by this Tyagaraja,  
while Bharata, Lakshmana and Satrughna serving Him,  
Anjaneya holding His holy feet, and the valorous Sugriva  
and other important personages extolling Him]*



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**YOGACHARYA**  
**Dr. ANANDA BALAYOGI BHAVANANI**

Yogacharya Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani is Chairman of the International Centre for Yoga Education and Research at *Ananda Ashram*, Pondicherry, India. He is also chairman of Yoganjali Natyalayam, the premier institute of *Yoga, Carnatic Music and Bharatanatyam* in Pondicherry. He is son and successor of the internationally acclaimed *yoga* team of Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj and Yogacharini Kalaimamani Ammaji, Smt. Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani. He is a Gold Medalist in Medical Studies (MBBS) with Postgraduate Diplomas in Family Health (PGDFH) and *Yoga* (PGDY) as well as *Advanced Diploma in Yoga* under his illustrious parents in 1991-93. A Fellow of the *Indian Academy of Yoga*, he has authored 19 DVDs and 22 books on *yoga* as well as published more than a hundred papers, compilations

and abstracts on *yoga* and *yoga* research in National and International Journals and magazines. He is a Classical Indian Vocalist, Percussionist, Music Composer and Choreographer of Indian Classical Dance in addition to his duties as Deputy Director of the Centre for Yoga Therapy Education and Research (CYTER), MGMC & RI, Pondicherry. In recent years he has traveled abroad 13 times and conducted invited talks, public events, workshops, retreats and been major presenter at *yoga* conferences in the UK, USA, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Australia and New Zealand. He is an Honorary International Advisor to the IAYT (International Association of Yoga Therapists), USA and various *Gitananda Yoga* Associations all over the world.



**YOGACHARNI  
Dr. SANGEETA LAURA BIAGI**

Yogacharini Sangeeta Laura Biagi, researches, practices and teaches *yoga*, sound and music. Originally from Siena, Italy, she received a Master and a Ph.D. from the Department of Performance Studies at New York University. Her dissertation, earned under the guidance of Professor Richard Schechner, was on the relationship between ritual music and dance in the Southern Italian healing ritual of *tarantismo*. She served as a Visiting Professor in Italian Folklore and Music at New York University and Vassar College (NY) where she was a recipient of the Andrew W. Mellon Award to promote dialogue among faculty in the fields of arts and science. She was also the recipient of the Carolyn Fae Grant grant in 2010, 2011 and 2012 to bring contemplative and *yogic*-based practices into academia. In the fall of 2012, through the support of this grant,

she lectured on sound and embodiment in the departments of Music, Drama, Dance, Religion, English, Italian and Psychology at Vassar College. Between 2009 and 2011, Sangeeta lived and researched at the International Center for Yoga Education and Research (Ananda Ashram, India), earning an Eighteen-Month Residential Senior Yoga Teachers Diploma in Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga, in the Paramparya of Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri. In the United States, she has performed, taught and presented lectures on music and *yoga* at New York University, Vassar College, La MaMA theatre, Judson Church, Gallery at Deep Listening Space; in India at ICYER, Yoganjali Natyalayam, at the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga in New Delhi, and at the J. Nehru Medical College in Wardha; in Italy at the Associazione Culturale Artè, Centro di Ashtanga e Rishi Yoga in Milan, Italy; and in Germany at the Gitananda Yoga Association in Berlin, Germany.



## Ananda Ashram at the International Centre for Yoga Education and Research (ICYER)

This world famous Yoga Institute has been offering intensive **Six Month International Yoga Teachers Training Courses** from October 2nd through March 25th since 1968, without any break. Thousands of students from all over India and the world have been thoroughly trained in an intensive Yoga programme which starts at 4.30 am each morning and concludes only by 9.00 pm each evening. **CLASSICAL RISHICULTURE ASHTANGA YOGA (GITANANDA YOGA)** as expounded by the world famous *Guru, Yoga Maharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj* is taught in carefully graded steps. Swami Gitananda, a Medical Doctor born in India but who spent forty years in the West, taught *Classical Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga (Gitananda Yoga)* with a scientific, medical basis. The revered Swamiji, considered one of the five leading world experts in *Classical Ashtanga Yoga*, attained *Maha Samadhi* on December 29, 1993.

Yogic cleansing practices and fasting, diet and nutrition are basic to the course. More than 108 *asana*, 44 *pranayama* and 56 *kriya* are taught in the six months. Thorough study of the *Yoga Sutra*, *Upanishads*, *Yoga Vasishtha*, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita*, *Bhagavad Gita* and other important Yogic texts is made. Training is also given in Carnatic Music, with emphasis on devotional *bhajan*. Those interested may also study *Bharatanatyam* and Classical Instrumental Music. Training in *Raja Yoga* and *Jnana Yoga* techniques are given, including elaborate work with Yogic relaxation, concentration and visualization practices. Seats in the course are limited to ten persons annually, who are accepted only after going through preliminary instruction with the Institute's trained teachers as well as participation in the 52 Lesson Correspondence Course, **Yoga: Step by Step**, which is the basic syllabus of the Six Month Course. The Institute has a traditional *Gurukula* setting, in an ideal garden atmosphere, on the shores of the Bay of Bengal. Students are also introduced to the Indian way of life, festivals, cultural programmes, community activities and Hindu rites and rituals, to cultivate an awareness of the culture from which Yoga has sprung.

From October 2001, this course has been extended to an additional six months training, for those considered suitable, giving "hands on" training in Yoga teaching and class organization as well as undertaking senior *yoga* practices. Those eligible for this



advanced Yoga work will at the end of the one year training receive a *One Year International Diploma in Yoga Education*. ICYER has more than one hundred affiliated Yoga centres in twenty two countries of the world. Thirty books have been published, as well as a monthly magazine, **Yoga Life**, which has completed more than 45 years of publication for a worldwide audience. The **International Centre for Yoga Education and Research (ICYER)** is also headquarters for several worldwide organizations, including **Vishwa Yoga Samaj**, **Yoga Jivana Satsangha** (International) and the **Society for the Preservation of Rishiculture Yoga (SPARC)**. The **International Centre for Yoga Education and Research** is also the office headquarters for **Sri Kambaliswamy Madam**, a 140 year old *Samadhi* site of the great Ashtanga Yoga *Guru* Sri Sri Kambaliswamigal at Thattanchavady, Pondicherry. The *Samadhi* of its founder, Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj, is also located at Sri Kambaliswamy Madam and has become a world famous pilgrimage place. Swami Gitananda left his body in *Maha Samadhi* at 2.20 am on December 29, 1993, *Arudhra Darshan Day* and the full moon in the Tamil month of *Margazhi*. Daily *puja* are conducted at Sri Kambaliswamy Madam, with elaborate *puja* every Sunday morning. Sunday *puja* are open to public who wish to experience a traditional Hindu *puja*. Grand *puja* for the *Samadhi* of the eight *Gurus* of the lineage are conducted throughout the year, as well as many Carnatic Music Festivals at the **Sri Kambaliswamy Madam**.

The **City Centre** of ICYER, **Yoganjali Natyalayam** was established on March 29, 1993. This flourishing Centre of *Yoga*, *Bharatanatyam* and *Carnatic Music* with more than 400 actively enrolled students and 15,000 alumni is located in central Pondicherry, behind the New Bus Stand. It caters to the needs of the local populace as well as providing special individual and personally tailored lessons for passing tourists and those visiting Pondicherry on a short term basis. **Yoganjali Natyalayam** has developed a very popular *Bharatanatyam* troupe, which specializes in performance of the difficult acrobatic **Natya Karanas**, which are essentially a form of *asana*. The Centre presents full length *Bharatanatyam* dance dramas every year in to celebrate the birthday of its visionary founder, while its spectacular Annual Day held every year is a feast of spectacular music, dance and Yoga demonstrations.

**THE FOUNDER:** A Master Yogi and great Spiritual Teacher, **Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri** had the unique talent of infusing the mystic insights of the *Rishi* into practical life. The exponent of a Bengali *Tantric* tradition, which stretches back hundreds of years, Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri, a medical doctor and scientist, was able to express the abstract ancient insights in practical modern terms. One of the greatest Masters of *Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga* in the twentieth century, Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj of Pondicherry, India, was a brilliant and dynamic *Guru* known as THE LION OF PONDICHERRY. He taught hundreds of thousands of persons worldwide, the intricate and demanding art and

science of *Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga*, through his books, his magazine articles, his monthly magazine *YOGA LIFE*, and his world tours in which he lectured and taught hundreds of thousands of seeking spirits worldwide. His influence on the modern world of Yoga is immense. He was named *Madathiapathi* of Sri Kambaliswamy Madam in 1975 and carried out his religious duties scrupulously. He founded **Ananda Ashram** (1968) and later, the **International Centre for Yoga Education and Research** (1989) on the shores of the Bay of Bengal, eight kilometers north of Pondicherry. He also founded in March 1993 **Yoganjali Natyalayam**, to teach the Indian cultural arts of *Bharatanatyam* and *Carnatic Music*, as well as *Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga* to the local populace. Throughout, his approach was scientific, rational and systematic. In 1987 he was awarded the title, "*The Father of Modern Scientific Yoga*" by *Vishwa Unnyanan Samsad* of Calcutta. He was also one of the pioneers in bringing the concepts of traditional *yoga* to the Western mind. On December 20, 1986, Swami Gitananda Giri was awarded the title "*YOGA SHIROMANI*" by the then President of India Shri Zail Singh Ji, at the *World Yoga Conference* held in New Delhi. He personally taught an intensive Six Month International Yoga Teachers Training Course in his Pondicherry *Ashram* for twenty five years from 1968. On March 10, 1986, Swami Gitananda was appointed to **Central Council for Research in Yoga and Naturopathy, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, New Delhi**. Swami Gitananda cooperated and served as advisor to Government in organizing the *First International Yoga Festival* in Pondicherry sponsored by Department of Tourism, in January 1993. Since then, the Festival has been held yearly from January 4th to 7th, and Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani continues to act as advisor for this grand event. Her services and that of Swami Gitananda are regularly and publicly appreciated by the Pondicherry Government at this festival. Swami Gitananda was given so many other honors, including the honour of being the First Vice President of the *All India Association of Mutts and Ashrams* based in Kancheepuram, Tamilnadu to which he was elected in 1983. The organization was headed by the Presidentship of the Shankaracharya of Kancheepuram. To name Swamiji's accomplishments would take volumes and indeed, volumes have been written on him. No history of Yoga in modern times is complete without reference to his name. He is the author of twenty two books on Yoga, and conducted five *World Conferences on Yoga*. More than 135 centres of *Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga* are established worldwide, with thousands of *Ashtanga Yoga* teachers trained by him now actively propagating not only Yoga, but also various aspects of Indian culture. He was part of the intellectual community of Yoga practitioners, and was the Chief Patron of the prestigious *Indian Academy of Yoga*, centered at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.

**THE DIRECTOR:** Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani was born in the United States in 1943 but came to India to study Yoga at the age of 25 and fell in love with

the country and its culture. She has lived in India ever since, and received Indian citizenship on November 30, 1992, in her own words “the proudest day of my life”. She met her *Guru* in Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj in 1968, and since that time has devoted her life to his teachings and to institutions founded by him. She has been instrumental in training more than 20,000 village children in the art and science of Yoga and *Bharatanatyam* since 1975 through the **Sri Kambaliswamy Yoga and Fine Arts Programme**. Hundreds of those children have taken up Yoga and *Bharatanatyam* teaching as full time careers. She is a journalist by profession and her articles and essays appear in national and international magazines and newspapers. She has been editor of the international magazine **Yoga Life** since 1970 and is Managing Editor of the *Ashram's* publishing unit Satya Press. She is **Director of Studies (Ashram Acharya)** for the *Six Month International Yoga Teachers Training Course* offered annually at ICYER from October 2nd to March 25th, as well as for the year long *International Diploma in Yoga Education* offered from October, 2001 at ICYER. She is a popular Conference and Seminar speaker. She has been Organizing Secretary for **five** major *International Yoga Conferences* in Pondicherry. She is a prolific author and has written a dozen books, including two books of poetry. She has been recipient of many National Awards and was awarded the title “**YOGAMAN!**” by the President of India Shri Zail Singh Ji in 1986 at an *International Yoga Conference* held at the Asian Village, New Delhi. In 1998 she was awarded the National Award, **Bhaskar Award** by Bharat Nirman and Indian Trade Promotion Organization, New Delhi. In 1999, Pondicherry Government recognized her service for Indian Classical Dance and gave her the **Puduvai Kalaimamani Award**. She was awarded a **Gold Medal** by Government of Pondicherry for her work in *Bharatanatyam* in 2001. She has received numerous awards such as *Outstanding Senior Citizen, Achiever Award, Best Educationist Award, Puduvai Pugal Sertha Pennamani, Sigaram Thotta Magalir, Sri Aurobindo Award and Puduvai Shakti* in recent times. She is an honored patron and advisor to *Gitananda Yoga Associations* of USA, UK, Italy, Germany, Australia, Czech Republic, Spain, Canada and Switzerland. She has served as an eminent *Yoga Expert* on the **Central Council for Research in Yoga and Naturopathy, under the Health Ministry, Government of India, New Delhi** as well as the **Finance Committee** of this Council. She has also been a member of the **Academic Council of Pondicherry University** and is presently an eminent *Yoga Expert* on numerous committees in the Health, Education and Human Resources ministries of the Central Government of India. She is Director of **Yoganjali Natyalayam**, a popular City Centre for the propagation of *Yoga, Bharatanatyam* and Carnatic Music and has developed its famous *Bharatanatyam* troupe. **Yoganjali Natyalayam** was founded in 1993 as a continuation of the **Sri Kambaliswamy Yoga and Fine Arts Programme** that was begun in 1975. She has worked tirelessly to reinstate the ancient acrobatic *Natya Karanas* into the *Bharatanatyam* repertoire and has presented lecture demonstrations on this topic at the ABHAI dance festivals in

Chennai. She has also composed, choreographed and directed more than fifty Dance Dramas in the last twenty five years, the majority of which are in Tamil, a language she greatly admires.

Perhaps one of her greatest claims to fame is the authorship of the monumental work **History of Yoga from Ancient to Modern Times**. The work is more than 2000 pages in two volumes and traces the development of Yoga from Vedic times up through the Yoga exponents of the seventeenth century through to the twenty - first century. She has also authored a book **Rishi and the Rakshashas** which details her impressions and experiences with personal observations on the changes in India and its culture over her life experience of nearly five decades in the country. numerous committees in the Health, Education and Human Resources ministries of the Central Government of India.

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"MUSIC  
IS LIFE  
AND ALL  
LIFE IS  
MUSIC!"



If life is the non-stop interaction between the internal and external environment of every *jiva*, then music is indeed life itself. Every breath we take resonates with the *ajapa japa* (*hamsa sohum*) and every biological rhythm of our body, mind and emotions is but a manifestation of the interconnections, we as the microcosm share with the universal, cosmic macrocosm.

This book is a compilation of deep, introspective, inspirational dialogues between Yogacharya Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani and Yogacharini Dr. Sangeeta Laura Biagi on the "Yoga of Sound". These trans-cultural interchanges deal with the spiritual and hidden, mystical aspects of music and Yoga such as:

1. *Nada Yoga: Healing Sounds*
2. *The Origin of the Chant*
3. *Listening as a Tool for Purification*
4. *Guru-Chela*
5. *The Artist as a Humane Being*

The title, *Saraswati's Pearls* is based on the concept of a *sutra*, a series of aphorisms set together as pearls on a string. The image of the pearls resonates with the pearl necklace in the hand of the divine muse of music and the fine arts. Each of the dialogues can be appreciated like a pearl, perfect and yet imperfect, whole in itself and yet connected to the others, containing some of the infinite *satvic* wisdom of the great Goddess Saraswathi. It is a joy, an honor and a humbling privilege to share their shimmering light with you, our dear reader.

Dhivyananda creations

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